MID-JUNE ISSUE, 1921
VOL. XXIX No. 6

ADVENTURE

25 Cents

JUNE
18th
1921
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PUBLISHED
TWICE A MONTH

Adventure

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Norman Springer
Thomson Burtis
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Arthur Mallory
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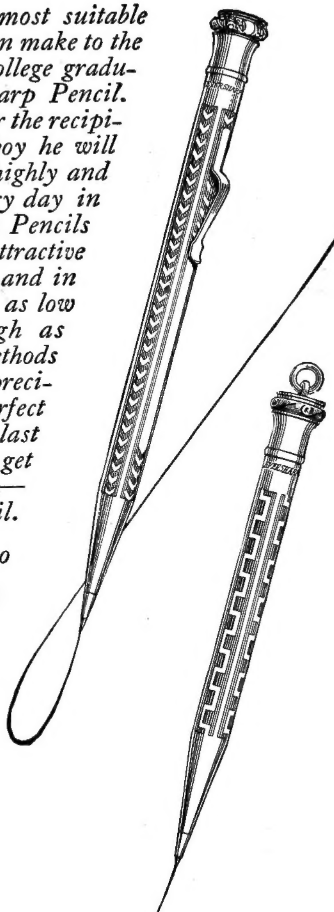
For the Graduate



ONE of the most suitable gifts you can make to the high school or college graduate is an Eversharp Pencil. No matter whether the recipient is a girl or boy he will prize this present highly and find use for it every day in the year. Eversharp Pencils are made in many attractive designs both in silver and in gold. They are priced as low as $1.00 and as high as $65. Made by Wahl methods which means jeweler precision, these pencils give perfect writing service and will last a lifetime. Be sure you get the genuine Eversharp—the name is on the pencil.

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EVERSHARP

Made by
The Wahl Company
Chicago

The Old Way.

Factory
Branch House
Salesman
Agent
You

Two Ways of Selling the OLIVER Typewriter

The New Way

Factory
You

The New Way Saves You $36

THE OLD WAY: **It cost $36 to sell you a typewriter. Rents of offices in many cities, salaries, commissions and other costly practices — each demanded its share.**

THE NEW WAY: **We ship from the factory to you, eliminating all wastes. This saves the $36, and it now goes to you. A $100 Oliver costs you but $64. Why waste $36 by buying typewriters the old way?**

These Facts Will Save You Money

Note that this advertisement is signed by The Oliver Typewriter Company itself. It is not the advertisement of a concern offering second-hand or rebuilt Olivers of an earlier model. The Oliver Typewriter Company makes only new machines.

The old way, as explained above was wasteful and wrong. So people have welcomed our new economical plan and our output has multiplied.

We offer for $64 the exact machine which formerly sold at $100. This is our Model Nine, the finest typewriter we ever built. It has the universal keyboard, so any stenographer may turn to it without the slightest hesitation and do better work more easily.

And it has dozens of superiorities not found elsewhere. For instance, it has far fewer parts. This means longer wear, and naturally few or no repairs.

This Oliver Nine is a 20-year development. If any typewriter is worth $100, it is this splendid model.

It is the same machine used by great concerns such as United States Steel Corporation, National City Bank of New York, National Cloak & Suit Co., Otis Elevator Company and hosts of others. Such concerns demand the best. Yet they are not wasteful.

FREE TRIAL

Merely clip the coupon below, asking us to send a free trial Oliver. We do not ask a penny down. When the Oliver arrives, try it out. Put it to every test. Compare its workmanship.

Then, when you are convinced that the Oliver Nine is all we claim, and you prefer it, pay us at the rate of $4 per month.

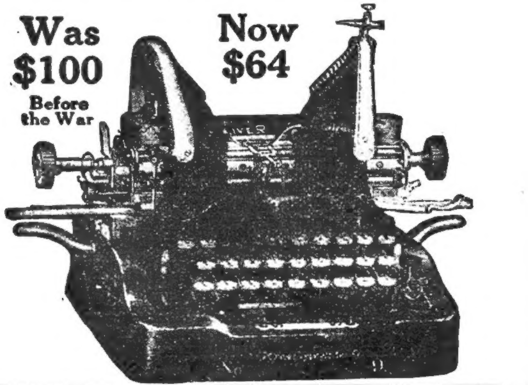
During the free trial, you are not under the slightest obligation to buy. If you wish to return it, we even refund the out-going transportation charges.

Used typewriters accepted in exchange at a fair valuation.

Or, if you would rather know more about our plans before ordering a free-trial Oliver, check the coupon for our amazing book entitled, "The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy." We accompany it with our beautifully illustrated catalog describing the Oliver Nine.

Avoid disappointment—Order now to secure immediate delivery.

Canadian Price, $82



Mail Today

The OLIVER Typewriter Company
736 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

THE OLIVER TYPEWRITER COMPANY
736 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

☐ **Ship me a new Oliver Nine for five days free inspection. If I keep it, I will pay $64 at the rate of $4 per month. The title to remain in you until fully paid for.**

My shipping point is..

This does not place me under any obligation to buy. If I choose to return the Oliver, I will ship it back at your expense at the end of five days.

☐ **Do not send a machine until I order it. Mail me your book—"The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy," your de luxe catalog and further information.**

Name..

Street Address..

City..........................State..........................

Occupation or Business..

ADVENTURE
June 18th, 1921

Published twice a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York City. Yearly subscription $4.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Volume 29
Number 6

"We Must Fly To-night!"

Out of a deep sleep he woke her. She thought she knew him so well. Yet now, at two in the morning, he burst on her with this terror—this mystery—this what?

It's the beginning of one of the best mysteries ever solved by the great detective.

CRAIG KENNEDY

The American Sherlock Holmes

ARTHUR B. REEVE

The American Conan Doyle

He is the detective genius of our age. He has taken science—science that stands for this age—and allied it to the mystery and romance of detective fiction. Even to the smallest detail, every bit of the plot is worked out scientifically. For nearly ten years America has been watching Craig Kennedy—marvelling at the strange, new, startling things that detective hero would unfold. Such plots—such suspense—with real, vivid people moving through the maelstrom of life! Frenchmen have mastered the art of terror stories. English writers have thrilled whole nations by their artful heroes. Russian ingenuity has fashioned wild tales of mystery. But all of these seem old-fashioned — out of date — beside the infinite variety — the weird excitement of Arthur B. Reeve's tales.

FREE—10 Volumes—POE

To those who send the coupon promptly, we will give FREE a set of Edgar Allan Poe's works in 10 volumes.

When the police of New York failed to solve one of the most fearful murder mysteries of the time, Edgar Allan Poe—far off there in Paris—found the solution. The story is in these volumes.

He was a detective by instinct—he was a story teller by divine inspiration. Before or since—no one has ever had his power to make your hair stand on end—to send chills up your back—to hold you in terror—horror! To read breathlessly—to try to guess the ending—to enjoy the perfect, flawless style — to feel the power of the master — that is what you can do in each and all of Poe's undying stories.

This is a wonderful combination. Here are two of the greatest writers of mystery and scientific detective stories. You can get the Reeve at a remarkable low price and the Poe FREE for a short time only. **Send no money.**

Cut out this coupon and mail it today

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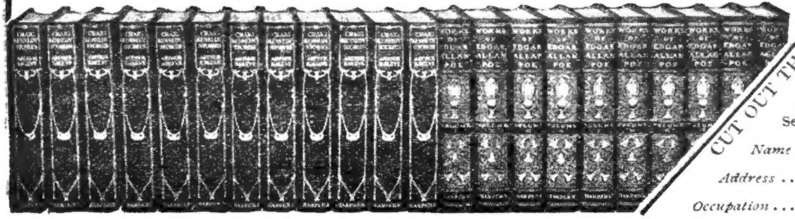
TWO SHELVES OF BOOKS



CUT OUT THE COUPON AND MAIL IT TODAY

Adv.
6-18-21

HARPER & BROTHERS
200 Franklin Sq., New York

Please send me, all charges prepaid, set of Arthur B. Reeve—in 12 volumes. Also send me, absolutely free, the set of Edgar Allan Poe — in 10 volumes. If the books are not satisfactory I will return both sets within 10 days at your expense. Otherwise I will send you $2.50 within 5 days and $3.00 a month for 9 months. Send for our Special Canadian Offer.

Name ....

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Occupation ....

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BLEND
OMAR
TURKISH
BLEND

OMAR
CIGARETTES
"Smoke Omar for Aroma"

The same thing you look for in a cup of fine coffee—AROMA—is what made OMAR such a big success.
OMAR is as enjoyable as a cup of fine coffee.
$12,000,000 of OMAR AROMA enjoyed last year (and still growing)

Aroma makes a cigarette—they've told you that for years

OMAR
OMAR OMAR

Guaranteed by
The American Tobacco Co.
INCORPORATED
—which means that if you don't like
OMAR CIGARETTES you can
get your money back from the dealer

Amazed at her own story!

Why Don't YOU Write Stories?

Maybe you think you CAN'T write when you really CAN. Thousands of people of ordinary education who "didn't think they could," now write stories and photoplays in their **spare time!** Why not YOU! By the New Irving System men and women everywhere are finding out it's as easy to learn story writing as it is arithmetic or grammar! And all these people formerly thought they had to be literary geniuses in order to WRITE!

Lots of those thrilling **movie plays** you see—endless magazine stories you've read—were written by people LIKE YOURSELF, who took up writing simply because they liked it and *wanted to see if they could do it.*

Why not find out if you, too, can write?

How do you know you really can't?

Maybe with the New Irving System you would surprise yourself, your family and friends!

Wouldn't you like suddenly to develop a fine, new talent like this?

It is so fascinating! It gratifies, it enthuses, it thrills you! It makes you happy—it elevates you. You learn to move people to laughter or tears—to "paint pictures in their minds"—to deeply interest them—and your story or photoplay has as much chance of greatness as those of any other author. Why not? It has happened before—time and time again. Sometimes the simplest stories catch the popular fancy. Often the unknown author springs to fame overnight. Out of the crowd—out of the unknown—have come our famous authors and playwrights.

You can study story and play writing after your working hours, or even in the street car going to and from your work. Think! *Instead of wasting that time in your trips back and forth you can be learning something wonderful*—something that may mean a New Future for you! Join the ambitious ones who no longer waste their spare hours. And don't hesitate because you have an ordinary education—that may be a HELP instead of a hindrance. Brilliant people have really done less in writing than the plainer, persistent ones who had common sense and determination.

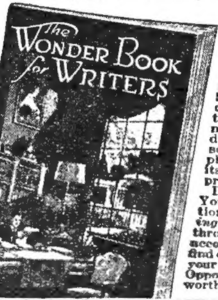
The Authors' Press, of Auburn, N. Y., is helping people succeed as writers--people of small means and modest occupations who thought it impossible for them to write at all--who now sell their stories and plays to magazine and scenario editors.

Since the advent of the movie, the science of story writing has made big strides. *You owe it to yourself to find out all about this.* **Through this New System you are readily taught the correct way to write a story or play.**

The Authors' Press, Auburn, N. Y., will send you, absolutely free, a beautifully illustrated book you will be grateful for---a book for people who don't know whether or not they can write. It is filled with helpful suggestions for everyone seeking self-advancement.

This book is something you may have long looked for---it explains many things about Writing Plays and Stories: how to begin; how to find incidents and people to write about; how to originate plots; how to weave romantic situations; how to construct dialogue; how to perfect your manuscript; how to submit it to magazine and photoplay companies. This book, with its many interesting illustrations, will prove a revelation to you in many ways.

Don't hesitate. Send for it. No charge. You are not under the slightest obligation. You have as much chance of ***learning something new*** **as anybody else---and through this simple new system you may accomplish wonders! It doesn't hurt to find out, anyway. The coupon below is for your convenience---it opens a New Door to Opportunity---it paves the way to something worth while. USE IT.**



THE AUTHORS' PRESS, Dept. 188, Auburn, N. Y.

I would like to have a copy of your free descriptive illustrated booklet for those aspiring to write. This does not obligate me in any way.

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Street ....

City and State ....

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Well made and effective; modelled on the latest type Revolver; the appearance alone is enough to scare a burglar. When loaded it may prove just as effective as a real revolver without danger to life. It takes the standard .22 Calibre Blank Cartridges obtainable everywhere. **A Great Protection Against Burglars, Tramps and Dogs.** You can have it lying about without the danger attached to other revolvers. **PRICE 50c. Better make and superior quality for $1.00, Postpaid. Blank Cartridges .22 Cal., shipped by express 50 cents per hundred.**

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In Your OWN HOME

Our method of teaching is so simple, plain and eas that you begin on a piece with your first lesson. In ha an hour you can play it. Complete course und personal direction of Prof. A. Hinchcliffe, a musical d rector and violin teacher of prominence for the pas forty years. Low price includes Violin, Bow, Case, Chi Rest, Rosin, Tuning Pipes for all strings, extra set of string and complete conservatory course of instruction. Special arrangement for lessons if you have your own instrument. Sa isfaction guaranteed. Write to-day for full particulars—free!

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Dept. 220 233 Broadway, New York City

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WE'LL HELP YOU ALONG

By composing the music FREE and publishing same. Send poems to-day.

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High School Course in 2 Years

You can complete this simplified High School Course at home inside of two years. **Meets all requirements for entrance to college and the leading professions. This and thirty-six other practical courses are described in our Free Bulletin. Send for it TODAY.**

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Dept. H-A4 Drexel Ave. & 58th St., CHICAGO

BLANK CARTRIDGE PISTOL SENT PREPAID Only $1

7 inches long, **real revolver style.** For protection and sport, every man, woman and boy should have one. Order at once. Get an American flag **FREE.** Money refunded if desired.

M. F. LEWIS CO., 1402 BROADWAY, NEW YORK CITY.

SHORTHAND
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WHAT IT DOES

LEARN SHORTHAND FREE

Instruction Book of Shorthand free on request. Learn in your spare time at home this practical and sensible profession.

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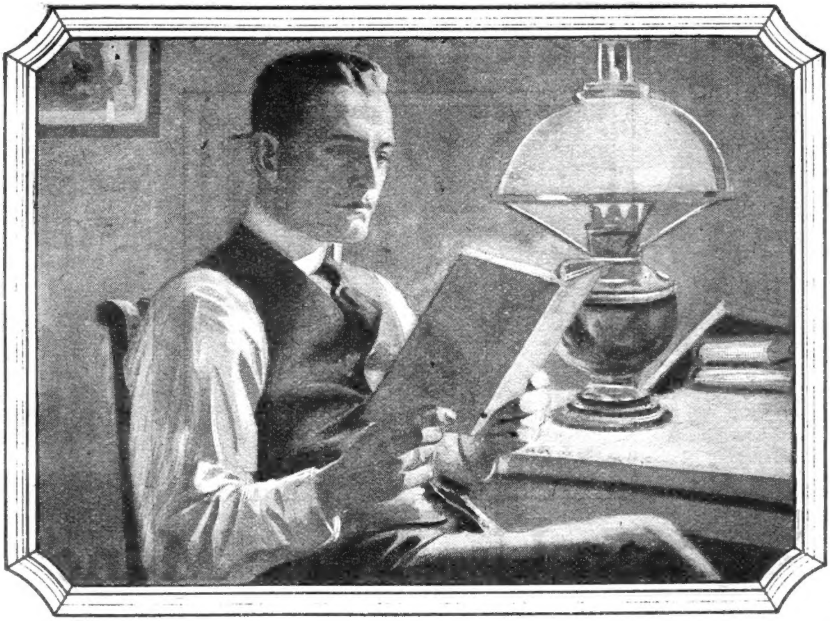
GET HIGH CASH PRICES

by mailing us diamonds, watches, new or broken jewelry, platinum, old gold and silver, War Bonds, War Stamps, unused postage, etc. Cash by return mail. Goods returned in 10 days if you're not satisfied.

OHIO SMELTING & REFINING CO., 252 Lennox Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio



$95 An Hour!

"Every hour I spent on my I. C. S. Course has been worth $95 to me! My position, my $5,000 a year income, my home, my family's happiness—I owe it all to my spare time training with the International Correspondence Schools!"

Every mail brings letters such as this from some of the two million I. C. S. students. For 29 years men in offices, stores, shops, factories, mines, railroads—in every line of technical and commercial work—have been winning promotion and increased salaries through spare time study with the I. C. S. Over 100,000 men are getting ready *right now* in the I. C. S. way for the bigger jobs ahead.

What are *you* doing with the hours after supper? Can you afford to let them slip by unimproved when you can easily make them mean so much?

No matter where you live, the I. C. S. will come to *you*. No matter what your handicaps, or how small your means, we have a plan to meet your circumstances. No matter how limited your previous education, the simply written, wonderfully illustrated I. C. S. text-books make it easy to learn. No matter what career you may choose, some one of the 280 I. C. S. Courses will surely suit your needs.

One hour a day spent with the I. C. S. will prepare you for the position you want in the work you like best. Yes, it will! Put it up to *us* to prove it. Mark and mail this coupon *now!*

TEAR OUT HERE

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

BOX 2002 C **SCRANTON, PA.**

Explain, without obligating me, how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject, *before* which I mark X.

- ☐ ELECTRICAL ENGINEER
- ☐ Electric Lighting and Railways
- ☐ Electric Wiring
- ☐ Telegraph Engineer
- ☐ Telephone Work
- ☐ MECHANICAL ENGINEER
- ☐ Mechanical Draftsman
- ☐ Machine Shop Practice
- ☐ Toolmaker
- ☐ Gas Engine Operating
- ☐ CIVIL ENGINEER
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ MINE FOREMAN OR ENGINEER
- ☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER
- ☐ Marine Engineer
- ☐ Ship Draftsman
- ☐ ARCHITECT
- ☐ Contractor and Builder
- ☐ Architectural Draftsman
- ☐ Concrete Builder
- ☐ Structural Engineer
- ☐ PLUMBING AND HEATING
- ☐ Sheet Metal Worker
- ☐ Textile Overseer or Supt.
- ☐ CHEMIST
- ☐ Pharmacy
- ☐ SALESMANSHIP
- ☐ ADVERTISING
- ☐ Window Trimmer
- ☐ Show Card and Sign Ptg.
- ☐ Railroad Positions
- ☐ ILLUSTRATING
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- ☐ BUSINESS MANAGEMENT
- ☐ Private Secretary
- ☐ Business Correspondent
- ☐ BOOKKEEPER
- ☐ Stenographer and Typist
- ☐ Cert. Public Accountant
- ☐ TRAFFIC MANAGER
- ☐ Railway Accountant
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ GOOD ENGLISH
- ☐ Common School Subjects
- ☐ CIVIL SERVICE
- ☐ Railway Mail Clerk
- ☐ AUTOMOBILES
- ☐ Mathematics
- ☐ Navigation
- ☐ AGRICULTURE
- ☐ Poultry Raising
- ☐ Spanish
- ☐ Teacher
- ☐ Banking

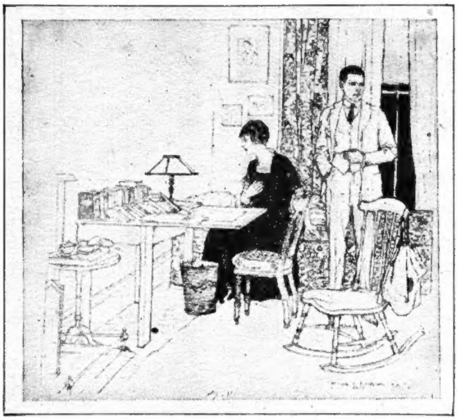
Name____________________

Present Occupation__________ Business Address__________

Street and No.____________________

City__________ State__________

Canadians may send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada 1-4-21



Can You Use More Money?

"Mary and I had been trying to get along on a $1,500-a-year income. Finally, the day arrived when, after a siege of increases in rent, food, clothing, etc., our small savings had been completely used up and we were indeed gloomy about the future. Mary remarked: 'We ought to do something, Jim!'

"It wasn't much but it surely did 'strike home,' for I knew she was right. I determined then and there not to have her feel that way again.

"First of all I analyzed my problem. At the bottom it was simply that of *having my income meet all demands placed upon it*—not only current expenses, but to have enough left over for those little luxuries which are so necessary and, in addition, save for a home of our own—those things we had longed for.

"After I had come to this conclusion and looked for a way out for about an hour, I happened to pick up a copy of ADVENTURE to see if I could temporarily relieve my mind of trouble and care. In paging through its contents, I came across an advertisement with the headline:

Sell Us Your Spare Time

"That was it! I had plenty of spare time. You may be sure I read that ad through from beginning to end. It was surprising. It told me briefly how I could make all the money I wanted in my spare time by simply accepting subscriptions from my friends and acquaintances for ADVENTURE, THE DELINEATOR, THE DESIGNER and EVERYBODY'S MAGAZINE. No capital, no experience was necessary. I jumped at the opportunity, clipped out the coupon which would bring me all particulars and a complete representative's outfit, filled in my name and address, inserted it in an envelope and ran down to the mail box to get it off at once, forgetting in my excitement all about a hat and coat.

"Mary met me at the door on my return. 'What is the matter?' she exclaimed. 'Are you crazy?' I took both of her hands in mine and, more to cheer her up than anything else, I said, 'Mary, I have found a way which will enable us to forget all our money problems.'

"That statement turned out to be the truest one I have ever made. By return mail I received everything necessary to start and carry on my Butterick Subscription Work—all supplies, detailed information and instructions. A little booklet, entitled 'Turning Spare Time Into Cash,' was what I called 'The key to it all.' I read it over many times and each time found it more interesting and instructive. I still have it and refer to it often.

"No doubt you have guessed by this time that I am now a Butterick Representative, earning commissions and a salary check regularly every month. The amount of my earnings depends solely on the time I have to spare.

"Mary is just as enthusiastic a Subscription Worker as I am. It has been with her assistance that I have increased my Butterick income so rapidly. Mary and I are soon going to celebrate the anniversary of our becoming full-fledged Butterick Representatives, and the expenses of the celebration will all be defrayed with Butterick earnings."

Mary and Jim are only two of the many thousand Butterick Subscription Workers who are earning all the extra money they need in their spare time. The same opportunity is offered to you if you act immediately.

MAIL THIS COUPON TO-DAY

STAFF AGENCIES DIVISION
703 Butterick Bldg.
New York

Please send me without obligation a complete representative's outfit and all particulars concerning your money-making plan; also a copy of "Turning Spare Time Into Cash."

Name..........................

Street..............................

City.................... State............

A Soothing Shave

Plus 4 things more

By V. K. Cassady, B. S., M. S., Chief Chemist

Multiplies itself

Soothes the skin

Acts quickly

Maintains itself

We wanted to give men the benefits of palm and olive oils in shaving.

We knew these softening, soothing oils were the best for the face—for 3,000 years that had been known. But our problem was to apply their balmy blend to a shaving cream.

It was not easy—though we certainly knew soap making well. Our creation of the finest toilet soap known had proved that.

We made up and tested scientifically 130 different kinds of shaving cream. We tested all other known creams, too. We found their virtues and their faults. And step by step, and month by month, we improved our formulas until we seemed to reach perfection in each quality desired.

Formula No. 130 was right

In this formula we found we had at last attained the ideal shaving cream. It proved superior on these tests:

It multiplies itself in lather 250 times. Just one-half gram—a bit of cream—proves plenty for a luxurious shave.

The oil coating on the beard is removed almost instantly. Within one minute the beard absorbs 15% of water—enough to soften the stubbornest beard. Such quick efficiency is astonishing.

The lather maintains its rich creamy fullness for ten minutes on the face. Plenty of time to shave.

The palm and olive oils are the supreme lubricant, soft and soothing to the skin. So the need for lotions is ended.

Now test it yourself

Millions have already adopted Palmolive Shaving Cream because of these superiorities.

The coupon will bring you a trial tube without cost. You will be delighted with what we accomplish for you.

PALMOLIVE
Shaving Cream

1229

10 SHAVES FREE

Simply insert your name and address and mail to

Palmolive Company, Dept. 233, Milwaukee, U. S. A.

....

....

Corns Will Go

while you sleep—if you do this

© B & B 1921

APPLY Blue-jay to a corn tonight—the *liquid* or the *plaster*. It is done in a moment.

The corn ache will end; the removal of the corn will begin.

Hour by hour Blue-jay will gently undermine that corn. In a little while the corn will loosen and come out.

The way is easy, gentle, sure and scientific. A famous chemist perfected it. A laboratory of world-wide repute prepares it.

Millions of corns every year are removed by it. Countless people, by its use, keep free from corn pains always.

Cease your wrong methods. Try this modern, this efficient way.

There is no need for harsh treatment, no need for soreness. And paring is futile and dangerous.

All about you are people delighted with the Blue-jay method. Find out what they know about it. Try it tonight.

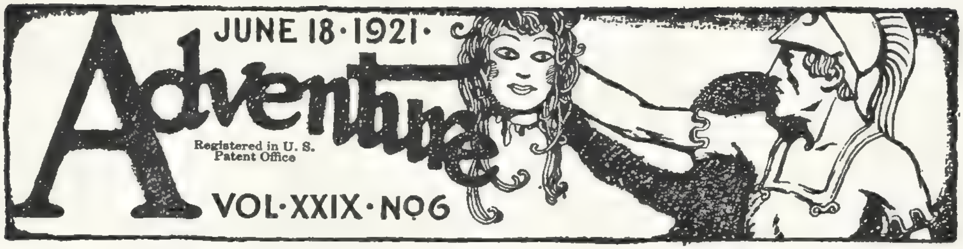
Plaster or Liquid

Blue=jay

The Scientific Corn Ender

BAUER & BLACK Chicago New York Toronto

Makers of B & B Sterile Surgical Dressings and Allied Products


JUNE 18·1921·

Adventure

Registered in U. S. Patent Office

VOL·XXIX·NO 6

Published Twice a Month by THE RIDGWAY COMPANY

J. H. GANNON, President — C. H. HOLMES, Secretary and Treasurer

Spring and Macdougal Streets — New York City
6, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England

Entered as Second-Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post-Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

Yearly Subscription, $4.00 in Advance — **Single Copy, Twenty-Five Cents**

Foreign Postage, $2.00 additional. Canadian Postage, 60 cents.

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The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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Headings . . . . **George M. Richards**

Cover Design . . . . **Charles Stafford Duncan**

Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of *Adventure*, published semi-monthly at New York, N. Y., for April 1, 1921. State of New York. County of New York. *ss.* Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared James F. Birmingham, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the business manager of the *Adventure* and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are: Publisher: The Ridgway Company, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City. Editor, Arthur Sullivant Hoffman, 223 Spring Street, New York City. Managing Editor, none. Business Manager, James F. Birmingham, 223 Spring Street, New York City. 2. That the owners are: (Give names and addresses of individual owners, or, if a corporation, give its name and the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 per cent. or more of the total amount of stock.) *Owner:* The Ridgway Company, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City. *Stockholders:* Federal Publishing Company, a corporation, 15 Exchange Place, Jersey City, N. J. Stockholder of Federal Publishing Company: The Butterick Company, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City. Stockholders of Butterick Company: George B. Black, 812 Lincoln Avenue, Mendota, Illinois. John M. Donington, 37 Wall Street, New York City, N. Y. W. H. Gelshenen, 100 William Street, New York City, N. Y. Gude, Winmill & Co., 20 Broad Street, New York City, N. Y. S. R. Latshaw, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. Estate of H. F. Morse, c.o. Garfield National Bank, New York City, N. Y. H. G. Millard, 132 East 19th Street, New York City, N. Y. Laura J. O'Loughlin, 156 Ridge Street, Glens Falls, N. Y. Mrs. Arethusa Pond, Hotel Remo, New York City, N. Y. Erman J. Ridgway, 280 Broadway, New York City, N. Y. Augustus Van Wyck, 149 Broadway, New York City, N. Y. R. A. Van Wyck, 149 Broadway, New York City, N. Y. G. W. Wilder, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. Marie A. Wilder, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. Ben F. Wilder, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. 3. *That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding* 1 *per cent. or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities are:* (*If there are none, so state.*) None. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. 5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the six months preceding the date shown above is. (This information is required from daily publications only.) James F. Birmingham, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 30th day of March, 1921. Cecil L. Wahl, Notary Public, Kings County. Certificate filed New York County. (*My commission expires March* 30, 1922.) (Seal.) Form 3526.—Ed. 1916.

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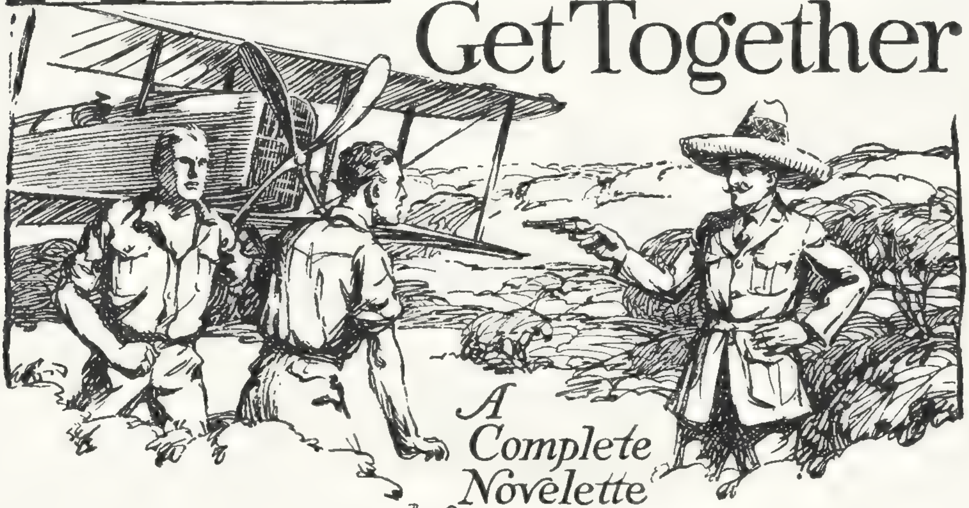
When Good Fellows Get Together



A Complete Novelette

by
THOMSON BURTIS

Author of "Dumpy Puts One Over," "The Winning Chance," etc.

AS THE wheezing, rattling little train puffed along on the last of its trip from San Antonio to McMullen Lieutenant David Ransom, late of the Artillery and now of the Air Service, was sunk in reverie. In fact, he had been in a state of joy ever since he had received his assignment to the McMullen flight of the Air Service border patrol. He felt himself one of the elect. Had not the fame of the border-patrol flyers been dinned into his ears ever since he had joined the Air Service? And now he, a veritable recruit, with his observer's wing shining in bald newness, was to become a member of the group which was the pride of the service.

His mind roved back to the days when, as an officer of the Field Artillery in France, he had watched the airplanes with hungry eyes. Like most officers of other branches of the service, he had pooh-poohed the talk of great danger in the air, and had even tried to patronize the flyers. But all the while he was envying them, admiring them, wishing with all his soul that he was of them. And so were nine out of ten of the younger officers among the ground troops.

Months before this day, which was to mark his advent along the Rio Grande, he had requested orders granting him a permanent commission in the Air Service. They came, and there followed speedily three months at Fort Sill for observer's training. It was there that he learned of the border patrol which twice a day covered the Mexican border from Gulf to Gulf, and of the men who sent their great De Havilands roaring through clear weather and stormy over the deserted badlands of the Big Bend, the towering mountains west of El Paso and the furnace-like desert-land in Arizona.

"Boy, you never saw any flying till you see those border-patrol birds go to it," Bascom, an old observer who had been his instructor, was wont to say. "They stop for neither man nor devil, land habitually in fields that some flyers I know couldn't get a Jenny into and day after day they spend from two to four hours over desert or mesquite where the only good it does you to try to crack up without getting killed is to

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give you a chance to starve to death."

One by one he had learned almost to know the outstanding stars of the patrol. "Hub" Chester of Sanderson, "Dumpy" Scarth of Marfa, George Wadbury out in Nogales, "Tex" MacDowell and Jimmy Jennings of McMullen itself—all were names to conjure with, standing out because of some particular opportunity that had come their way. And every week a new name became better known, for the border patrol was an eventful detail. Gradually there had grown within him a feeling that to attain an assignment on the Rio Grande was to become an admitted aristocrat in his new profession. And it had dropped into his lap!

He grinned to himself, perhaps a little shamefacedly, as he remembered the awed interest he felt when Covington and Jerry Carter were pointed out to him at Donovan Field. Carter, of the Department Flight, the special ships of which covered the border periodically, carrying Colonel Feldmore with Carter at the stick; Covington, with two thousand hours in the air, testing the ships which would later be flown to the border fields. Ransom was only twenty-three and all the boy in him had risen in admiration as he watched these famous young veterans of the air go casually about the business which to Dave himself was still so wonderful.

He awoke from his mental soliloquy as the dusty train bumped into McMullen, only half an hour late. There had been nearly twenty hours of riding to cover the two hundred and fifty miles from San Antonio and the passengers alighted as if from a transcontinental trip. The engine wheezed and whistled into self-satisfied somnolence.

A sergeant approached, saluted easily, and inquired—

"Lieutenant Ransom, sir?"

"Right. You're from the airdrome?"

"Yes, sir."

The sergeant took his two suitcases and his trunk-checks and led the way to the khaki-colored official car. The star-in-the-circle emblem of the Air Service was painted on it in colors. While the sergeant was handing over the checks to a truck-driver Ransom watched the crowd disperse. The number of high-priced automobiles which backed and turned down the village street surprized him. Clearly, it was a prosperous community, this McMullen. His quick trip down the main street confirmed the impression.

A really beautiful hotel, built of stucco material, was matched by solid business blocks, wide paved streets and sparkling shop windows. He noticed that he was an object of interest to many people. Many waved or smiled, perhaps unaware that he was a new member of the flight that was the special pride and joy of the town. Dave returned their greetings happily and looked covertly at his shining half-wing very often.

During the ten-minute ride to the airdrome he thought again of the men with whom he was to work. He was eager to see in person the flyers he had come to know so well by hearsay. Captain Kennard, the C. O., was a D. S. C. man with two boches to his credit. Then there was George Hickman, the observer who climbed around a ship in flight with nonchalant ease. It was Hickman who had clung to a wing-tip while Tex MacDowell, newest and brightest star of the border clan, had landed his ship with one wheel gone. MacDowell—it was queer why the name should seem to be so familiar to him. At odd intervals he had tried to make definite the hazy recognition that the name always aroused in his mind, without success.

In a swirl of fine dust the car turned into the airdrome. The hard-baked field shimmered in the afternoon heat. It was flanked on three sides by corrugated-iron hangars, tents and a few frame buildings. The northern edge was bounded by a fence. A few enlisted men were working on two ships, drawn up on the line in front of the eastern row of hangars.

The car stopped in front of one of the buildings.

"This is headquarters, sir," the sergeant informed him and placed his baggage on the board walk.

Ransom walked into the cooling breeze of an electric fan and informed the clerk that he wished to report to the commanding officer. In a moment he was shaking hands with a stocky, smiling captain who hadn't given him a chance to salute.

"Glad to see you, Ransom. Have a chair."

THE captain didn't ask many questions. In less than a minute they were talking about France, with special reference to the delights of leave in Paris. During the intervals when Ransom, his shyness forgotten, was doing the talking Captain Kennard was appraising him keenly.

He saw a slender young fellow of medium height, with a clean-looking, sensitive face. Close-cropped, slightly wavy red hair—the C. O. wondered how much temper that fiery thatch indicated. He was well satisfied with his latest charge however, even though he did give an impression of eager boyishness that was yet to be verified by his work. According to his artillery record Ransom was no weakling by a long row of beans, despite his youth.

"Most of the fellows are taking naps except those on patrol. I suppose you'll be wanting to get cleaned up after your flashing progress on the McMullen express."

The captain's attractively homely face lighted up with a wide grin.

"You're lucky, though, at that. I've spent thirty-six consecutively dirty hours on that same trans-county flyer."

"That's about a day and a half too long," answered Dave, rising. "Did you say I had tent number two?"

"Right. Your stuff will be in there by now, unless it got bumped off along the route from San Antonio somewhere. You'll meet the gang at supper-time. The showers are in that building at the foot of the walk, past the tent-line."

"Thank you, sir."

The captain strolled to the door with him. Although Ransom was not tall, the C. O. was shorter by several inches. Nevertheless, there was a quiet forcefulness apparent in the level eyes and somewhat lined face that the younger man had been quick to feel.

"You're coming to a flight of good fellows, Ransom," said the captain as Ransom turned to go. "This bunch gets there; we've got a record to be proud of and one to live up to. I think you'll catch the spirit—and remember that unlike any other branch of the service, we are doing work in peace-time that is nearly as dangerous as our war service, and of immediate importance. When it comes to a pinch, the main thing is to make that patrol!"

For some strange reason Dave could not say what he wanted to, but his expression was satisfactory as he saluted, his eyes meeting his commanding officer's without wavering.

"Good kid," thought Captain Kennard as he watched his subordinate turn the corner. "Young, all right, but got the stuff."

II

AN HOUR later the young observer was luxuriously clean, moderately cool and immoderately happy and satisfied with his lot. He gazed around his small, square, wooden-floored tent with affectionate ownership. He still had that queer feeling of shyness when he thought of the experienced veterans of the flying-game with whom his lot was cast—"like some —— green freshman" as he expressed it to himself—but he assured himself that that would wear off. His resolution hardened. He'd show 'em! He allowed himself to drift off into hazy dreams of accomplishment that would put his name alongside the magic names that stood for stardom in the Air Service.

A low hum came to his ears and he strolled to the tent door. He quickly picked up the ship, coming from the eastward patrol to the Gulf, evidently. He watched it steadily, a little smile on his face.

"Hello! You must be that reformed artilleryman!"

He turned to meet a couple of twinkling brown eyes set in a very tanned face. The owner was chastely arrayed in a bath towel and slippers. He was evidently making the board-walk promenade from bath-house to tent.

"Right you are—name of Ransom!" laughed Dave.

"My name is Miller—first name Pete. By way of warning, never call me Petey. It outrages my dignity."

"As befits a recruit, I'll make careful note of that. Is that ship coming from patrol?"

"Yep. Tex MacDowell and 'Peroxide' Hickman. Only don't call him Peroxide. They're our popular movie stars, you know, or maybe you don't."

"Yes, I heard about it, but I didn't get to see the pictures. Where did Hickman get the name 'Peroxide'? "

"Well, you see he and Tex were up at Donovan Field and George—that's Hickman—being one of these —— fools that crawls all over a ship for excitement, was doing some aerial daredevil stuff for a movie-weekly man. They arranged it up there for Air-Service recruiting publicity. As a final stunt Tex sideslipped down to the ground with George hanging on the vertical fin. They just touched, but one of the wheels crumpled up, without either Tex or Hickman knowing it, and they lit out for McMullen with one wheel gone.

"We got a wire from Donovan Field and stopped 'em from landing by blocking the field with cars, ships and everything else, signaled 'em what was wrong, and they finally made a peach of a landing with Hickman hanging on one wing to keep the wheelless side off the ground and Tex handling the D. H. like a feather. The movie man had wired old Phillips down here, who has a movie camera and does some work for the weeklies, and old Philly was right on the ground when they landed, so the whole bunch of pictures in combination were a knockout.

"When they were shown just a few weeks ago the light was such in one close-up that Hickman's hair—naturally yellow—looked like peroxide blond. He and Tex got a lot of mash-notes from women and we got kidding George about being a peroxide vamp of the movies until it got his goat. You can't kid Tex," he added as an afterthought.

"Seems to me I must know MacDowell," said Ransom, as the pair watched the coming ship. "There's something familiar about the name, but I can't just place it. His first name is Lee, isn't it?"

"Right. Best flyer in seven States, too. Watch him."

The De Haviland, roaring low over the town, came hurtling toward the field. It swept around the little airdrome in a left-hand turn and then, instead of going northward to glide in, tilted up, shot toward the ground in a sideslip, came out in a sweeping skid that caused the inexperienced Ransom to hold his breath for a second, and having killed speed by this method, landed lightly. As it taxied slowly toward the waiting mechanics on the line Dave could see the famous Hickman standing up in the rear seat.

"See that?" inquired Mills. "Tex always comes in some cock-eyed way like that—says it's good practise for forced landings, and he's right."

A tall young fellow came out of tent three, yawning sleepily. He was wearing a bathrobe and carrying towel and toilet-kit. He walked with a pronounced limp. As he sighted little Mills in all the glory of his back-to-nature charm he stopped in horror.

"Salome at the sink!" he breathed, and then grinned. "Been using your bathrobe for a lap-robe again!" he accused.

"No—wrapped up my laundry in it," replied Mills. "Ransom, this is Jimmy Jennings, at present a cripple due to mistaking his altitude and trying to dive eleven hundred feet when he was only a thousand feet high."

"Serious mistake. Glad to meet you, Ransom. Welcome to our city, and all that stuff. After betaking myself to yon boudoir and washing off the dust with cooling——"

"Sufficient! *Kamerad!* I apologize!" shouted Mills and scampered toward his tent.

With a friendly grin Jennings strolled on toward the bath-house. As Dave followed him with his eyes he thought of all he had heard about that same young flyer. A recklessly brilliant airman, he had nearly killed himself by deliberately ramming the nose of his ship into the ground to avoid hitting a truck which was driving around the edge of the field. His motor had cut out on the take-off, and there was no possiblity of clearing the truck, which was occupied by two enlisted men. He could have hit the truck, gone through it like tissue paper and probably remained unhurt himself.

As it was, he was just completing six months of pain and enforced invalidism. And Jerry Carter, carrying a doctor from Donovan Field, had lost the use of his elevator controls when the wires snapped. They had been filed by a mechanic who had a grudge against the young commander of the Department Flight, but Jerry had saved the lives of himself, his doctor-passenger and Jimmy Jennings by bringing the helpless ship down with nothing but his motor to keep it level.

Truly it was good to be one of the bunch.

III

AT THE behest of the dinner-gong Dave hurried toward the mess-hall. Once again he was conscious of that uncomfortable feeling that he was a pigmy among giants.

As he approached the mess-hall a close-harmony chorus raised their voices in song. Through the open windows came the words, to the tune of "Forty-Nine Bottles Hanging on a Wall":

"Ten thousand dollar-r-r-rs, going to the folks,
Ten thousand dollar-r-r-rs, going to the folks,
Engine goes blooey! Another flyer croaks.
Ten thousand dollars, going to the folks!"

The words "ten thousand dollars," referring to the amount of Government insurance each Army man carries, were drawn out dolorously, and each combination of notes was brought out with lingering effect as the songsters let themselves out. "Going to the folks" was sung in snappy time. At the end of the cheery verse a chorus of mingled applause and groans shook the ceiling.

As Dave entered the trio had started again. Captain Kennard walked over to him with a welcoming grin and started introducing him to the dozen men who were waiting for the fat Chink factotum to serve dinner. The songsters came last.

"Hickman, meet Ransom," and Dave shook hands with the huge blond observer, who grinned widely and greeted him heartily.

"Jennings you already know, and lastly, we present Tex MacDowell."

Dave turned to face the tall, clean-cut pilot, and even as he put out his hand recognition came to him. Like a flash his smile froze and as his eyes met MacDowell's they were hard as flint.

MacDowell was the first to break the suddenly dramatic silence.

"I think we've met before," he drawled with his characteristic half-mocking smile. As he put out his hand the smile widened into an altogether likable grin. Ransom, his head in a whirl, took it, and even as he did so hated himself for his weakness. For Lee MacDowell, premier flyer of the border, was the one man in the world he hated. No wonder the name had been familiar!

Captain Kennard, with quick tact, started the song again and Ransom turned away, taking out a cigaret with shaking hands. The other men, who had noticed the little drama being enacted before them, looked at one another in puzzled astonishment. What was biting this new man? But characteristically they said nothing and by the time dinner was on the table the hot-headed Ransom was himself again, outwardly.

Inwardly he was miserably unhappy. For the time being even his hatred was secondary as he thought ahead. MacDowell was already well known throughout the Air Service—spoken of with respect and admiration hundreds of miles away. What did it matter what Ransom, the recruit, thought of the famous Tex?

He looked at the big lean-faced pilot with the level gray eyes and the whimsical, half-mocking curve at the corners of his mouth. Laughing, joshing his comrades in softly drawling good-humor, Tex was the picture of ease and self-assurance. MacDowell, formerly of the Royal Air Force, three Huns to his credit, conqueror of Dumpy Scarth in a flying-contest, entitled to wear a string of decorations across his blouse from two governments—he knew his record, —— him!

Dave bolted his food without tasting it as he thought back to that day in Arilla, Texas, when this same MacDowell had made him a public laughing-stock. Even now his face flushed as he lived it over again, but it passed from his mind for the moment as he saw his air castles come tumbling down about his ears. Life at McMullen could hold but little contentment now. In ten minutes or less probably the whole group would have heard the story and he would certainly be the butt of their mirth, very probably of their contempt. The uneasy conviction that he himself was mostly to blame was not comforting, and as often happens, that conviction simply intensified his attitude toward the man who had been his Nemesis.

As for Tex, his feelings were somewhat mixed, likewise. He had never been proud of that incident in Arilla, but it must have been funny.

"Still holding the grudge, too," Tex told himself as he made a frontal attack on the pie.

He raised his eyes, and met Captain Kennard's gaze. Tex grinned, shook his head slightly and shrugged his shoulders. Then he entered an animated argument between Binder and Mallory as to the relative merits of Matamoras and Juarez for purposes of wassail and debauch.

The argument was still unsettled as the group left the mess-hall and gathered in the recreation-room, where card-tables, a phonograph and many magazines were adjuncts to easy-chairs and picture-covered walls. A few went to their tents to prepare for the descent on divers McMullen homes. Jimmy Jennings was devoting himself to the task of making Ransom feel at home and Captain Kennard lent a helping hand. The result was that the youngster was feeling better, although he was ever conscious of MacDowell's presence.

"Fellow poker-hounds, I received a check from home today, it being my birthday, and I crave to lose it to Tex MacDowell. Anybody with me?" asked Pete Miller.

"If that's the way you're feeling, I'm trailing along," grinned Tex, as he rolled a cigaret.

"I still possess a few nickels," stated Binder, a lanky observer.

"How about you, Ransom me boy? Dost ever indulge? I warn you against a certain Texan who is a drawing, bluffing, pot-stealing fool, but the more the merrier!"

A refusal rose to Ransom's lips, but the smile on MacDowell's face decided him. So MacDowell thought he was afraid of him, did he? Besides, Dave really loved the game.

"Tickled to death," he replied.

THE game started with Mills, Ransom, Binder, Hickman and MacDowell. Tex, who had learned the game from his ranchman father at the tender age of eight, was in his element. He knew the value of his cards, was a master at varying his play and played for the sheer love of it. He never backed shorts, neither raised the pot nor laid down his hand, and bluffed just often enough to make sure of a reasonable number of calls. When he bluffed he started before the draw, and it took a good man to catch him unless there was a pat hand hanging around the table.

For two hours the game went along evenly. Mills had lost a few dollars and Tex, with a run of persistently useless cards, was behind as well. In the hands of another man his cards would have probably meant a hundred-dollar contribution, for he had been having that worst of all luck in poker—fairly good hands that never won. And Ransom had been the man who had topped him most. It was apparent to every one that Dave was playing as if MacDowell was the only man in the game and he made desperate draws and calls rather than let Tex get away with anything. Aided by very good luck, Dave was fifty dollars ahead, playing rather excitedly, although he was no amateur.

Abruptly the game broke. Binder with an ace-high flush raked in a big pot against a straight and three kings, eliciting loud wails from Mills and Hickman. Tex raised a pot that Binder opened and every one stayed for the sum of seven dollars After the flurry was over Tex showed three sixes, Binder threw away his three treys, while the four-card straight and flushes of the other three were unimproved. Every pot meant action for a while, until Tex had some two hundred dollars velvet, Dave was about even, leaving the other three holding the sack.

"Virtue is its own reward," remarked Tex as he shuffled the cards. "You see how badly off you are, George, according to the axiom."

"I'm goin to get washed of sin mighty sudden, then," Hickman replied, squinting appraisingly at MacDowell's bloated stacks of chips. "How do you happen to stay even against this man, Ransom?"

"My next attack will be in the Ransom sector," stated Tex with a grin that purged his remark of anything but good-humored badinage, but Dave looked up with quick resentment.

"—— sure of yourself, aren't you?" he sneered.

Suddenly the air was charged with excitement. The others looked at Tex quickly, but that comfortably lounging gentleman merely smiled mockingly.

"No, not exactly sure of myself," he drawled. "In fact, I'm getting scared."

As he swiftly dealt the cards his thoughts would probably have surprized the others, no one more so than Ransom.

"The —— little fool! But I don't know but what I'd be wrathy in his place, at that." Rather surprizing sympathy for a man who showed his dislike for him in every word and action. Tex was a baffling man in a lot of ways.

He threw his dealer's ante, a dollar chip, into the pot, which had been passed once, and looked at his cards. He had a four-card straight flush in spades—two to five, with a useless seven of diamonds.

"Pass," remarked Mills, on MacDowell's left, in somewhat too resigned tones. Tex glanced at him sharply.

"Open, for three dollars," stated Binder.

"Raised five," snapped Ransom, still smarting from his verbal passage at arms with MacDowell. He felt that he had made a fool of himself and had come out second best all around. As a matter of fact, he held only a pair of aces.

Hickman riffled his cards thoughtfully. "I've been stuck on these four-card straights and flushes so often I'm scared of 'em," he remarked plaintively, "but I guess I'll ride for the eight berries."

And he deposited a blue and three reds in the center.

" 'Tie that little bull outside,' " hummed Tex with dancing eyes. "Gentlemen, if I hit I've got a world-beater, so we hereby make the emolument total twenty-five dollars. Make a good hand pay dividends, dad used to tell me!"

Mills, who had passed three kings under the gun, changed from carefully hidden exultation to deep thoughtfulness.

"I guess I'll just ride," he announced.

"Thought you were laying back with a club, Pete," remarked Tex. "Why didn't you raise as you planned to?"

"Raise?" said Miller in careful horror. "I wouldn't even stay if I wasn't a sport!"

"If you stayed for sport, John D. Rockefeller is the next Olympic champion," Binder told him. "I'm out. Queens opened."

Ransom, a reckless light in his eyes, threw in enough chips to make his twenty-five. Hickman considered sadly and finally came in.

"That four-carder is looking better, eh George?" laughed Tex, and then looked speculatively at Ransom's flushed countenance.

"Cards, if any," he said to Miller, the while he was thinking—

"The kid's got a —— of a lot or else nothing."

"Two," replied Miller. Ransom took the same number, and Hickman, amid a chorus of groans, stood pat.

"One to the dealer," Tex announced.

"Fours!" groaned Hickman.

"It would serve you right for being so deceitful," replied Tex, laying his card carefully on top of the four he had kept. He had not seen it—didn't want to for a while. His eyes were sparkling with deviltry, for it was precisely the kind of situation he loved. The playing of a hand like that was meat and drink to him.

"I guess the bet is up to you, Ransom," he said.

Dave reached for his chips, and then stopped. His face was pale and strained.

"I guess I'll check to the pat hand," he said with an attempt at nonchalance.

Captain Kennard, who had been playing bridge, came over behind Tex to watch. The other bridge-players, by common consent, moved toward the game. A big pot was in the offing.

"Hum. Reached for his stack and then checked," Hickman reflected aloud. "You're either a —— good bluffer or you've got a whale of a hand, Ransom. Drew two—fours, full house, or else nothing to amount to much. Well, I'll feel the pot out with twenty-five."

"And a hundred," said Tex, counting out a stack of blues, which were valued at five dollars.

Miller tossed in his hand silently.

With every eye fastened on him Ransom took out a check-book, figured a moment and then in a voice he strove to keep calm said—

"I'm writing a check for three hundred—all I've got."

His eyes were on MacDowell, blazing defiantly. As had been plain all through the game, he was out to get Tex, but what did he have?

Hickman was forgotten—all eyes were on Tex. Hickman threw down his hand as Tex swiftly looked at his cards.

"Might have caught a fifth one," he grinned in explanation. He was the only man in the room who was calm and as he sat there with that little devil dancing in his eyes it was impossible to conceive of him as anything but victor. That was precisely the impression he gave in anything he was doing. Lounging easily in his chair, he studied Ransom for a moment.

"You win a pot, Ransom," he drawled. "And I need a drink."

Captain Kennard could not repress a start. When Tex arose the captain swiftly picked up his hand to verify what he had seen. As the excited, triumphant Ransom showed only aces and jacks, the captain's eyes met MacDowell's over the heads of the others.

Tex had laid down a straight flush.

"The kid hates me," he explained later to the C. O., "and I knew he was betting wild just to get me. I didn't want to break him. I'll tell you the whole story some time, maybe. I hope he'll get over his foolishness and quit acting young, though. He's making a mountain out of a mole-hill. Good night, sir."

The captain's eyes were luminous with

affection as he watched the tall young flyer's form fade into the blackness toward his tent. And he fell asleep that night wondering and worrying about the same thing that every other man of the McMullen Flight was discussing. But the captain had decided that he must settle things between Ransom and MacDowell, or else get rid of Ransom. As for that youth—he was congratulating himself on his victory!

IV

IT WAS two weeks, however, before the captain took action—action that was destined to have far-reaching consequences. During those two weeks Ransom remained on the fence, in the opinion of McMullen, ready to fall off into popularity or the reverse. He showed himself to be wonderfully eager to learn, deprecatory of his ability, conscious always of his greenness. On the practise patrols which he flew as observer every day his reports were nearly always as good, and sometimes better, than those of the regular back-seat man. He was about ready to take his turn. His spare time was used around the hangar, drinking in the wisdom of motors and planes from enlisted men who knew a Liberty motor down to the last bushing clearance.

But time and time again he caused a hush of disapproval to fall over the gatherings of the McMullen Flight when Tex MacDowell was present. His answers to the Texan's persistent efforts to make friends were curt and pugnacious. Usually the smiling, easy flyer contented himself with a mockingly humble retort, but occasionally the gray eyes hardened and his lean, tanned face set like granite.

Never did he allow himself to give any further evidence of resentment. And Ransom, with the uneasy knowledge that he was deliberately making an ass of himself, yet could not draw back. Pride—the memory of that day so long ago when all Arilla had laughed at him—drove him on into more reckless indications of his hatred and the farther he went the more difficult it was even to think of responding to MacDowell's advances.

And one Miss Natalie Brewster, pride and joy of the colonel commanding the near-by cavalry garrison, probably complicated matters considerably, for Tex was considered to be her favorite cavalier, and after the third day of Dave's stay at McMullen he himself was utterly in love with her.

Colonel Brewster's daughter was an Army girl, which means that she was more than just a beautiful woman. Creamy skin, ripe red lips and long-lashed eyes have always had the power to weave a net for unwary males, but Natalie was that rare kind of girl who can inject into her relationships with men a sweet, frank comradeship that was more like a man-to-man friendship than anything else.

All her life she had been among men—camping, riding, playing on Army posts where she often had been the only girl among a hundred men. For years she had been housekeeper, comrade and almost mother to Colonel Brewster. Add to natural beauty the health and grace and wholesomeness born of an outdoor life on forsaken border Army posts where riding, swimming and tramping frequently represented the only possible diversions for anybody, and you have Natalie.

Tex met her at a dance given by the flight and promptly asked her to grant him the next one.

"Oh, I'm sorry, but I've promised some one already," she replied, looking with interest at the man of whom she had already heard so much.

"How about the second?" inquired Tex.

"I have that one, too," she confessed.

"Sorry," grinned Tex and drifted away. And for the rest of the evening he danced joyfully with every McMullen matron present, whirling the somewhat more obese ladies about with many flourishes. He never failed to bring them back to their seats flushed and laughing, for Tex had a line when he wanted to use it. He would grin cheerfully at Natalie when they passed, and had the time of his life.

Now Natalie was the direct opposite of all that the word "vamp" has come to mean, but no woman accustomed to male admiration can brook indifference from an attractive specimen of the other sex. One by one every single man at McMullen had come under Natalie's spell, to be trained quickly into frank, sexless comradeship with all the tact born of years of admiration from all kinds and conditions of men. Natalie was twenty-two and from the time she started scampering around Army posts in pinafores she was the petted daughter of the regiment.

At the age when most girls are half-way through school, and attending juvenile parties, young lieutenants were already competing for the privilege of escorting the colonel's daughter wherever she might desire to go—and it was not because she was the colonel's daughter, either. She set out to bring Tex into line, and then found she liked him very much.

Pete Miller, who had often offered his heart and hand to the same young lady, once opined that he wished he had had sense enough to act indifferent for a while before springing the question, for Tex made no apparent effort to rush her. Not being introspective, he did not bother his head as to the precise nature of his feelings and would have been much amused at the idea that there was any sentiment attached to their friendship on either side. Which same idea developed in the minds of every man at McMullen, to say nothing of a few dozen downcast young cavalry officers. Tex thought her the most charming girl he had ever met, liked to be in her company if there was no poker game on, and more or less unconsciously drifted into the habit of seeing her very often.

Then came Ransom, who threw himself into the business of winning her with all the ardor and enthusiasm that was his, which was a good deal. His utter adoration was bound to affect any girl and Natalie was no exception. McMullen never discussed things of that sort, but they watched with interest. There were vague rumors of a time when Tex had dropped in to call when Ransom was there, and something had happened that always brought a troubled look into Natalie's eyes afterward when both men were near, but nobody knew exactly what it was, although they could surmise. Certain it was, however, that Ransom's attitude toward the strangely patient MacDowell was becoming more and more insufferable, so Captain Kennard took the bull by the horns.

He summoned Tex to his office one evening.

"How would a ride suit you, Tex? I've got something I want to talk over with you."

"Fine. I might be able to guess what it is, captain."

The C. O. grinned and led the way to his trim roadster.

"The bringing up of children," pursued Tex, "is inoculated with deviousness."

"Your vocabulary is a treat, Tex. When I get this bus running, I wonder whether you want to tell me about what's biting Ransom."

"I guess I might as well," replied MacDowell as the car slid smoothly along the road and turned toward town. "I haven't said anything about it because I hate to do what I know Ransom is afraid I will do—shoot off my mouth too much. But according to the lay as she stands, you have a right to know and of course won't say anything about it."

"Right. I've worked like a nigger for a year to get this gang happy, contented and have every man fit in. Sooner or later Ransom is going to cut his throat as far as this particular section of the Air Service goes or else come to his senses."

"Well, it was like this," Tex began as the captain eased up on the accelerator and pointed the roadster down the San Elizabeth Road, stretching palely white before them. "It was just one of those little things that turn out big. I'm not proud of my part in it, but it was funny, or so they tell me."

He grinned impishly in the darkness.

"I got home—that is, to Arilla, Texas, where dad has a house to use when he gets sick of the ranch—about a year ago. I was sort of a two-for-a-cent hero, you know, all ribboned up, prisoner in Germany, aviator and all that stuff. Ransom was up there with a little bunch of men to recruit for the Artillery. The fair was on at the time and these artillerymen had their booths up out there. I got there in the morning and ran into a bunch of the boys from the ranch right off. Well, between them and dad and other judges of good liquor, by the time the afternoon came along I was slightly illuminated. I always insist on the fact that I was not drunk, merely slightly tanked, and that not observable."

"Able to navigate, eh?" put in the captain.

"I WAS perfectly O.K., you understand, but what I mean is that perhaps I was in a little more receptive state for foolishness than I would have been without the liquor. Well, I proceeded to the fair to watch the afternoon races. I was still in the uniform of a British captain, and when I was going into the grounds to look for the boys from the ranch I passed one of these recruiters. He looked at me and did not salute. I was a little sore at the deliberate discourtesy and then I heard 'Bronc' Weston's voice saying that I ought to discipline this fellow. So Bronc and I chased him. I remonstrated with him sadly but firmly and as I remember it made him practise a few times.

"Well, this bird must have gone to Ransom and spilled a lot of stuff, because right in front of the grand stand Ransom, loaded for bear, lit on me like a ton of brick. He got nasty and I got a little sore. There was a big crowd around and even had he been right in bawling me out he had no business creating a scene.

"So to close the argument I made him call that lying sergeant and instruct him personally in saluting, to the great glee of the crowd. Without conceit I may say that I think Ransom, being mad, had already come out second best in the repartee, and when I beat it to the grand stand I left him red as a beet. You see, me being a captain and he only a lieutenant put him in a fix where he didn't know whether he had to stand it or not, and the temper of the crowd decided him.

"Then he made himself more ridiculous by trying to have me arrested, but dad, the mayor and a couple of judges called on him and persuaded him to drop it. The whole bunch left town that same night.

"I can see some point in the kid's being sore—he'd been cutting a big swath there in town and he must 've known that his getting mad about it and showing it so plain just made the laugh bigger. He's young and sensitive and being made ridiculous like that just rubbed him raw, and he can't forget it. Shucks! Even I can blush right now thinking of some times when I made a public fool of myself, and —— knows I'm hard-shelled enough!"

He laughed reminiscently.

"I remember my first dress-suit dinner-party at college. I'd heard it was considered very nice to push in a lady's chair for her to sit down at the table. Me and my partner came into the dining-room last, and found everybody else standing at their places. I didn't waste any time, but without waiting for the old doctor to make a move I just pushed in this poor damsel's chair and she had to sit down. Then everybody else stayed up while the old boy—the host—asked a blessing. Boy, I'm red right now when I think of it!"

The captain laughed.

"I've had a few of those things myself," he admitted.

"Ransom just got a big dose and the more he moons over it the worse he feels toward me. I wrote him an apology right after it, and since he's been down here I've taken him in hand privately twice. I'm sorry, and nobody realizes better than I do that I acted the fool, as well as Ransom. But as I say, I've gone out of my way to apologize to him and show him that I want to let bygones be bygones, and I fail to see anything more I can do. I'll be —— if I'm called on to lick his boots for him! Every time he sees me he lives it over, I guess, and because he's got a lot to learn he hasn't reached the point where he can forgive anybody who made him ridiculous. And he's so little I can't even lick him!"

The two were silent a moment as the little car sped smoothly along the moonlit road. Captain Kennard knew human nature and he found it easy to understand why the high-strung, sensitive Ransom mentally writhed under the memory of that day in Arilla, and also that the longer Dave continued to feed his hatred for Tex the more difficult it would be to change him.

"Tex, I'm going to put it up to you," he said finally. "I'm going to send you and Ransom on a more or less faked trip to El Paso for a week. The excuse will be to let you both study the liaison going on up there between the cavalry and the airplanes—they're doing spotting, radio-work, and so forth. Being thrown together like that you may be able to get under his skin and make him forget his grudge.

"He's got a lot of good stuff in him and I'd like to keep him, but sooner or later he'll be the means of busting the morale of this place all to —— unless he gets over his kiddishness. He's crazy about the Air Service and is proud as a peacock because he's on border patrol, although I think he's worrying a lot over you. I'm relying on you, old man and I think you can put it over."

"I'll try, but what he needs is an old-fashioned spanking," drawled Tex. "I look for a very—er—pleasant journey."

Which sardonic comment was to be justified, for it was indeed an eventful adventure in friendship which the captain started when he issued orders detailing Pilot Lee MacDowell and Observer David Ransom on a flight to El Paso.

V

THE first faint tints of dawn resolved themselves out of the gray eastern sky as MacDowell and Ransom, in helmets and leather coats, walked silently from the mess-hall toward the great De Haviland. The exhaust pipes were spurting fire in the half-light as the Liberty roared wide open. Their suit-cases were securely wired, snug against the fuselage. Tex clambered into the front seat and the mechanic gave him his place after cutting the motor to idling speed. More carefully than usual the pilot tested his motor. It idled sweetly on either switch and a quick inspection showed all gages reading correctly. For a moment he opened it up and then gradually throttled.

"Ready?" yelled Tex.

"Go ahead," shouted Ransom from the rear cockpit and in a moment, with two mechanics helping to turn the ship around, they had reached the edge of the small field. The motor took the full glow of gas and sprang into life, carrying them swiftly across the hard surface and then into the air. One circle of the field, and Tex started westward on his eight-hundred-mile trip to El Paso.

Ransom could not but admire the faultless, smoothly effortless way that the man ahead of him handled his ship. Not even the suspicion of slip or skid could he feel as the great plane tilted in steep banks, on its way around the field. Miller and Mallory, with whom he had flown, were good—exceedingly good—but even to a tyro the perfection of MacDowell's flying was apparent. Dave settled back to enjoy himself, for he was still new enough to have a passion for flying. The rays of the morning sun shot the ground-mist with golden arrows that painted mysteriously lovely pools of color, and above the sky was turning from gray to blue. He was glad he was going, even if it had to be with MacDowell.

Laredo was picked up in good time and their ship was gassed and oiled in a few minutes. They wasted no time, but took off the airdrome as soon as their ship was ready, to follow the Rio Grande to Del Rio. Another short stop and they were bound for Sanderson where they would stop for lunch. Tex alternately listened carefully to the motor and watched the deserted mesquite wilderness below. The mountains around Sanderson were dimly discernible, their crests shrouded in mist far ahead. The four hundred horse-power Liberty, running with even rhythm at one thousand five hundred and fifty revolutions per minute well within itself, gave no cause for worry, but drove its burden swiftly westward. Just as the little clock on the instrument-board showed twelve noon the Sanderson airdrome sprang into view, looking like a small brown blanket spread out at the foot of the mountains.

With motor half-throttled Tex pushed the stick forward and to the left and applied some left rudder. In the fastest tight spiral Dave had ever been in, the D. H. corkscrewed downward. Occasionally the motor roared wide open for a minute and the nose came up. Then the ship would tilt steeply, and for a moment they would drop like a shot, sideslipping earthward. Never a skid or a jerk—it was as sure and graceful as if the two-ton bomber were the lightest of single-seated scout planes. A forward slip brought them into the field comparatively slowly, and the grating noise of the tailskid on the ground was the first evidence Dave had that they had actually landed.

As they taxied toward the four canvas hangars, in front of which four ships were already lined up, a little group strolled out to meet them. Tex introduced Ransom to the Army men, but a bow-legged, over-alled civilian whose face was tanned to a mahogany shade he did not know.

"Lieutenant MacDowell, meet Mr. Ayres of the Texas Rangers."

It was Captain Merritt, C. O. of the Sanderson Flight, who made the introduction.

"So you're MacDowell of McMullen, eh?" said the ranger, squinting at the flyer with interest in his puckered eyes.

"None other. Surely the moving pictures, that vast new industry, have made his name familiar to you," put in Cory, a Sanderson pilot, with a grin.

"I don't know much about these here theatrical loominaries," began the ranger as he cut himself a slice from his plug of chewing-tobacco, "but——"

"One of the first principles in their treatment is quick nourishment and there goes the dinner-bell," said Captain Merritt. "Let's go."

"I want to have a little confab with you, lieutenant," the ranger said in a low voice as they started for the mess-hall. "Bound for El Paso?"

"Yes," admitted Tex. "Suppose we make it right after dinner. You arouse my curiosity, which is an effeminate weakness of which I am ashamed," he added.

"It's a tip on Dave Fitzpatrick," the ranger told him as they entered the mess-hall, where Tex received a noisy greeting from the remainder of the flyers. He indulged in various spicy bits of badinage anent mash-notes, sideslips into the ground in an effort to hit the landing-mark, and other references to his brief but eventful career as a border pilot, finally getting a chance to arrange with lanky 'Hub' Chester, engineer officer, that the McMullen ship be got ready to go without delay. Chester, who had made a world's record when he flew thirteen hundred miles and back on a special mission in two days, twenty hours flat flying-time, promised that the ship would be ready and then asked—

"Who's that observer with you—Ransom, did you say?"

"Uh huh. Why?"

"He's been looking at me pretty steadily ever since we sat down. I was wondering whether I ought to know him."

"He's a new man, afflicted with a vast admiration for border-patrol pilots. Your reputation, plus your fatal beauty, is what's responsible," grinned MacDowell. Chester was as homely as he was good-natured, which meant he was in no danger of being shot for his beauty.

As the meal ended and tobacco-smoke began to permeate the atmosphere Tex caught the Ranger's eye and nodded. They excused themselves and walked slowly toward the line, where Chester's mechanics were busy on the visiting ship.

"If you're bound for El Paso the warning I'm passin' on to you about Dave Fitzpatrick is what I call in the nick o' time," said Ayres.

"Oh, that's the lay, is it? Say, do you mind if I get my side-kick back there to hear what you've got to say? I'd like to have him know all there is, if we're going to be up against anything."

"Sure thing—nothin' very mysterious about it."

In getting Ransom, Tex was trying to play his hand for all it was worth with the young observer. He intended to pass up no bets in his effort to come to an understanding, for Captain Kennard's sake if nothing else. The puzzled Ransom followed him to where the ranger squatted in the shade alongside a hangar. Tex himself had but a shadowy idea of what Ayres' news might be.

"Before I say anything, do you mind tellin' me just what it was you did to Fitzpatrick, the time he raised such a stink up in Brownsville?"

"I was feeling somewhat festive, and flying my De Haviland along the San Elizabeth Road about five feet in the air. A car came around a corner, got scared and backed into a ditch. Fitzpatrick was the only one in it and I gather he had to walk some ten miles before he got a two-mule-power rig to haul his boat out of the ooze. I was sorry it happened, but it being Fitzpatrick, I bore up nobly when everybody from the general down bawled me out."

"And every one on the border laughed themselves loco," added the ranger with a grin. "Still, I don't quite see why that should make Fitzpatrick yearn for your scalp none. Accordin' to our dope—and she comes straight—he's out to get you."

"Who is this Fitzpatrick?" inquired Ransom.

"You must be new to the border, ain't you?" was the return query of the ranger.

Dave nodded.

AYRES sent a stream of tobacco-juice with deadly accuracy at a passing ant, deluging the unfortunate insect in a stinging flood.

"Fitzpatrick owns a store at Tia Nita, on the Mexican side of the river. And for twenty years, more or less, he's been makin' crooked money, smuggling firearms, opium, and lately hooch. That is, we know he has but we never pinned the goods on him. He's got a young army o' spigs, chinks and outlaw whites under his thumb all up an' down the border. We've caught a hundred of 'em, but it's plumb impossible to pry their mouths open. Fitzpatrick's got the confidence of every bandit from Villa down and there's a lot o' men say he's got pull on this side o' the river that has went plumb to Washington. And I've personally knowed men he's wanted to get rid of that has had something happen to 'em, *pronto*. Sometimes his work is coarse—the man gets shot by some unknown. Then again he satisfies himself with just gettin' something on a man and makin' him pull up stakes and git the —— off the border. Without mentionin' no names, there's been more'n one Army man that got too curious and then found himself explainin' so many things that he got transferred out. Old Sergeant Madden, o' the Cavalry, is still around, but he's been shot at more'n once, and I'm —— glad he's gettin' retired, for his own sake."

MacDowell's eyes were beginning to sparkle with the joy of coming conflict as the ranger was talking.

"But why should he be out for my scalp?" he inquired. "Outside of that one little *soirée* we had, I don't recall any previous dealings with the gent."

"I'd be plumb tickled to find out, myself, but one of our gang—Biddle, that works up around Marfa in the Big Bend—was in El Paso and heard some fellers kiddin' Fitzpatrick about you forcin' him to hike a few, and what Fitzpatrick says was that a guy by the name o' MacDowell better watch his step. If he hadn't been drinkin' he wouldn't 'a' said that much, but that much from him is a heap."

Ransom, listening eagerly, turned to look at MacDowell. The pilot's eyes were resting on the mechanics who were filling the McMullen De Haviland out on the line, but it was apparent that he was not thinking of them. He appeared to be groping for some memory that eluded him.

"Seems to me," he drawled—still gazing at the busy mechanics—"that I heard dad say somethin' once about some trouble he had with Fitzpatrick. I wonder——"

"Jehos'aphat! Is your pappy MacDowell that used to have the Circle Eight ranch?"

"That's him!"

"Well, I'll be cow-kicked! Funny I never thought o' that—I knowed they called you Tex, too. So you're Roarin' Bill MacDowell's boy, are you?"

The ranger chewed rapidly in an effort to digest the news.

"Boy, I seen your daddy rake in a eight-thousand-dollar pot up to the Adolphus Hotel in Dallas only two years ago, at the Stockmen's Convention, on a busted flush! And it's money to dead mules that Dave Fitzpatrick is after old Roarin' Bill more'n he is you."

"I shouldn't be surrounded," grinned Tex. "But dad'll take a lot of getting."

"I disremember just what it was—it must 'a' been twenty-five years ago, but I know it was something about your daddy catchin' Fitzpatrick cheatin' in a big stud game up to Palestine. Them in the game was all big stockmen, like your daddy, and there was —— near a killin'. I think they give Fitzpatrick a time-limit to leave them parts—he was ranchin' then himself—and he sold out and came down to Tia Nita. I clean forgot it was old Bill MacDowell that chucked his cards in Fitzpatrick's face. I never really knew your daddy, but everybody knew of him in them days."

"I guess dad was some boy in his prime," admitted the scion of Roaring Bill. "And he's still got a kick in either hand."

"Don't doubt," replied Ayres, his stubble-covered face a mass of wrinkles as it split from ear to ear in a reminiscent grin. "Well, to return to the business in hand, here's my idea o' just about what that old skunk Fitzpatrick is figurin' on. He's been keepin' that grudge o' his against your daddy all these years, which ain't very surprizin', neither. When he found out that the man who scared him off the road was the son of Bill MacDowell, it freshened up his mind on what happened in that stud session. Your daddy bein' somewhat well known and powerful up around north Texas, ain't so easy to get at, so it's a ten to one shot with no takers that old Dave is plannin' to pay off your daddy by knockin' you loose."

"How do you figure he'll go at it?"

MacDowell's drawl, ordinarily so slight that it was merely a pleasant, softly slurred deliberation in speech, was very slow as he asked this question. But strangely enough, as he glanced at the absorbed Ransom and then met the eyes of the weather-beaten old ranger, he seemed to be aglow inside. Those of us who knew Tex grew very familiar with those symptoms. He met the prospect of danger, a contest of any kind, with a reckless joy that found its only physical outlet in the leaping, dancing fire that turned his gray eyes into pools of flame. Strangely enough, aside from this manifestation of his temperament, a prospect of this sort seemed to make him a little more deliberate. His drawl became pronounced, his attitude almost lazy.

Perhaps Ayres saw a reflection of Roaring Bill MacDowell as he looked at Tex, for he grinned appreciatively.

"Well, Dave works in different ways," he answered reflectively. "I don't figure there'll be anything like shootin! I've heard o' fellows that got into poker games, gave a lot o' notes and found out they was in Fitzpatrick's hands. And there was a customs man I knew once—a woman busted into his room at the hotel, began screechin' for help and strangely enough there was a couple o' fellows next door that gave very compromisin' testimony. Somethin' the same has happened to some Army men—framed.

"Without knowin', exactly, I'd figure that it would suit Fitzpatrick to get you kicked out o' the Army by means of gettin' you corralled in some scrape. He'll know you're in El Paso before you been there a day and if I was you I'd keep out o' poker games with strangers, fight off any good-lookin' women that tries to get friendly, and I wouldn't go over to Juarez without about six good witnesses along in the party. *Sabe?*"

"That sounds easy," ruminated Tex, "although it's a cinch to frame a man unless he's got his eyes wide open."

"And easy to frame him so's this officer and gentleman stuff would look mighty bad, too."

He raised his voice as the motor in the McMullen ship was started for its warm-up.

"Without mentionin' no names, Fitzpatrick has been the means of some resignations from government service that was to Dave's advantage."

He slowly arose from his squatting position and spat deliberately.

"I'll mosey on down the line now," he said. "I just dropped in to give the dope to Cap'n Merritt to retail to you. Pretty lucky, meetin' up with you this way."

He looked up at the six-foot-two flyer, who had risen likewise.

"So long. I guess you and your friend here can take care o' yourselves."

"We'll try to—and thanks. So long."

Tex watched the bow-legged, overalled ranger stroll toward his pony, which was drooping in the shade of the next hangar.

"Looks like business might be pretty good this trip," he observed.

Ransom was tingling with excitement. He had been in shell-swept areas in France, but that had been merely impersonal horror. This man-to-man stuff—the checkmating of a border bad-man—adventure!

"We'll have to watch our step, all right, but now that we're wise——"

He did not finish the sentence. His mind was leaping ahead in vague pictures of future struggles. He had forgotten for the moment what MacDowell meant to him. Tex glanced at him. Those "we's" in the young observer's excited words had not excaped him. The corners of his lips curved slightly, but he said nothing. It might be that there was already an entering wedge in Ransom's armor of dislike . . . that Captain Kennard had planned better than he knew.

VI

THE trip from Sanderson to El Paso, broken by a landing at Marfa, was an unforgettable event for Ransom, and far from a matter of course to MacDowell, who had flown the course only once before. Ten thousand feet below them the railroad was the only evidence of civilization that could be seen. Towering, mesquite-covered mountains, part of the Rocky Mountain Range, rolled vastly from the Rio Grande. It was the far-famed Big Bend that was spread below—cruel desolation that provides perhaps the last surviving haunt in the United States for outlaws. Those forbidding fastnesses, bleak and vast, held beneath their green curtains unnumbered hunted bad-men who threaded their lonely ways below—perhaps were even then lifting hard eyes to the speck that was sweeping over them. The railroad seemed like a frail strand striving to hold the small outposts of the outside world together.

And in all that country nothing but a bad wreck faced the flyer whose motor should fail. Perhaps the twisting Rio Grande might hold some wide places where death could be postponed for a while, but weary miles of uncharted wilderness, inhabited by the refuse of a none too particular country, would still face any one fortunate enough to save himself in the sure wreck of landing. Tex watched nothing but his ship now, his eyes traveling from instrument to instrument.

The air-pressure had crept up a trifle—nearly five pounds. It was nothing to worry about, but even the slight prospect of choking the motor made the pilot carefully regulate the pump. New oil at Marfa had put the oil-pressure at a safe twenty-five. Fifteen hundred revolutions, engine running cool at the high altitude, voltmeter charging two—all was well, and yet Tex heaved a sigh of relief as the ship hurled itself over the last mountain-peak and El Paso sprang into view, the westering sun striking myriad points of light from the sprawling city. Fleecy clouds floated over it a thousand feet below the flyers.

The great level airdrome, five miles outside the city, presented a scene of great activity as the McMullen plane taxied to the line. Twelve De Havilands and a little scout plane that Tex quickly spotted as a Fokker were on the line, most of them with motors going. Many mechanics were working busily and a group of helmeted fliers greeted them.

"Make it all the way through today?" queried one of them, noting the McMullen Flight insignia on the fuselage.

Ransom nodded. Tex was still in the front cockpit, waiting for mechanics to bring wheel-blocks so he could turn up the motor, cleaning the plugs of any oil that might have fouled them on the glide in.

"My name is Barrett," stated the El Paso man, extending his hand.

"Ransom—I'm a new observer at McMullen. Glad to know you!"

Barrett introduced him to the other flyers. Ransom was secretly very proud of the casual way they accepted him as one of themselves.

"Who's the pilot?" asked Barrett.

"MacDowell," answered Ransom.

A stir of interest ran through the group.

"Tex MacDowell, eh? I've been pining to have a look at him," said a captain in the group. "He landed in here once a couple of months ago, but most of us missed him. He's sure been making a rapid reputation for himself down your way, hasn't he?"

Ransom nodded. He felt a gust of envy for which he was ashamed as Tex cut the motor, climbed out and strolled easily toward the interested group awaiting him. He was so sure of himself, so confident—he knew that he was an object of interest and admiration. And he, Ransom, was pitting his dislike against MacDowell. A sudden wave of depression engulfed him and he discovered that he was very tired.

Captain Baird stepped forward and introduced himself to Tex. As the others were being introduced a big official car rolled up to the group and Major Walters, commanding officer of the group which included all the squadrons of the border patrol, stepped out.

"Major Walters, may I present Lieutenant MacDowell, who just got in from McMullen?" said Captain Baird. "I thought perhaps MacDowell might solve our problem for us," he added.

Major Walters, a strapping six-footer himself, had to look up a trifle as he shook hands with Tex. His eyes twinkled as he surveyed the pilot from his oil-grimed face to his boots.

"Considerable correspondence about you and a Mr. Fitzpatrick passed through our office," the major remarked. "When you tried grass-cutting along that road and scared Fitzpatrick into the ditch you made us a lot of trouble, young fellow."

"Yes, sir," answered Tex solemnly.

He was noticing the little star above the major's wings; that meant six years of flying-experience. He concentrated his gaze there to prevent himself from revealing too much to the major. The C. O. might prefer humility about that incident and every time Tex thought of it and its ramifications it tickled his risibilities.

Finally, however, he met the major's eyes and his mouth widened in a generous grin. The major, after a moment's hesitation, returned it. They understood each other.

"Captain Kennard wired that you were coming to watch the work of the El Paso Flight with the cavalry. There will be no more until next week, on account of a formal inspection of all troops here by the commanding general, Saturday afternoon. Everybody is getting ready. There will be a formal review on the field. Have you ever flown a Fokker, lieutenant?"

"Yes, sir," answered the puzzled Tex.

"All right. Explain things to him, Baird. The rest of you fellows come over here. I've got some things I want to say before we take the air."

Captain Baird told Tex the situation concisely. As a feature of the formal review the Air Service was to fly a twelve-ship formation, and for stunting purposes Jerry Carter had brought down a Fokker from the Department Flight at Donovan Field. Now Jerry was in the hospital with a bad case of tonsilitis and every El Paso pilot was needed in the carefully rehearsed formation.

They had just decided to send for a man who could either fly the Fokker or fill in on the formation. Inasmuch as special formation stunts had been carefully worked up, they wanted to keep it intact. If Tex would fly the Fokker and give an acrobatic exhibition while the formation was getting altitude, and hold the air until the formation came over the field——

"Tickled to death," stated Tex. "I haven't had a chance to fly a scout since I got on the border. But if you don't mind, I won't go up until tomorrow. That'll give me two days to get my hand in before the show comes off and I'm pretty tired after the trip from McMullen."

Negotiations being satisfactorily completed, Ransom and MacDowell washed up in a bucket of water, donned blouses and caps from their suitcases and were shortly under way for the city. Quarters on the post were limited.

Strangely enough, it was Ransom who was thinking most of the coming Saturday afternoon and his thoughts were bitter. MacDowell always got a chance to grand-stand; and he would go out there and do some wonderful flying before the crowd . . . and Natalie Brewster would be there. She and her father were coming up for the review, Colonel Brewster being an old friend of the general's and Natalie herself planning to stay in El Paso for several weeks. He wondered whether Tex knew she was coming. The unworthiness of his thoughts did not occur to him then; he was very much in love, and the man beside him in the rattling jitney was in very truth his hated rival.

The hated rival was thinking likewise.

"I wonder how soon Fitzpatrick will start to work? I sure hope old Ayres was speaking a mouthful. If he was, this jaunt may turn into a regular jamboree!" he ruminated, and his fatigue was forgotten at the joyful prospect.

VII

THE hard, level flying-field was a colorful sight that Saturday afternoon. The review was over, but eight thousand khaki-clad troops, colors and standards rippling in the sun, were drawn up along the mile-long field, a temporary grand stand for the notables present providing the only gap in the long brown lines. Along the opposite side of the field, in front of the hangars, a seemingly endless line of automobiles held the onlookers from El Paso.

Twelve De Havilands and the little Fokker were warming up on the line. As Tex MacDowell, lean and bronzed, made his way toward the little scout a high-pitched cry reached him above the noise. He turned and his eye caught a fluttering handkerchief wielded by Miss Natalie Brewster.

As he came up to the car which held two other girls and two men he noted that Ransom was one of the occupants.

"McMullen is well represented," remarked Tex as he shook hands with Natalie. He acknowledged introductions to the other occupants of the car, who looked at him with much interest.

"Show these El Paso folks what McMullen can do, Tex," laughed Natalie, a charming figure in her cool linen suit and droopy Panama hat.

Tex surveyed her admiringly.

"We've got one prize exhibition here right now," he stated with the smile that always made Natalie wonder whether he meant what he said or not.

"Is that a compliment? If so, thanks."

"Well, I must mosey. I'm sure glad to have met you-all; hope I'll see you again after the ball is over. Would you excuse Ransom and me for a minute?"

The puzzled observer got out of the car and followed Tex.

"If Dave Fitzpatrick starts anything, I figure he won't wait longer than today," MacDowell said. "If anything comes up, I'll let you know, because I may be wanting your help."

Ransom nodded, a pleasant wave of expectancy sweeping over him. Tex strolled toward the Fokker, swinging his goggles idly in his hands. He had deliberately gone out of his way to include Ransom, for he thought that was the best means of cultivating him. Natalie's presence complicated matters, though. Apparently the only thing to do was to leave Ransom a clear field there to avoid friction.

"Seems to me I'm getting the little end of the stick on this deal all the way around," he soliloquized. "I promised the cap'n I'd do my ——est, but that little red-headed firebrand is sure causing a lot of trouble."

He lounged against the leading edge of the Fokker wing, waiting for the signal to start. A little knot of people were gathered near by, inspecting both ship and pilot with interest. MacDowell's eyes roved over the colorful scene the field presented as he wondered whether Ayres had given a false alarm about Fitzpatrick's intentions.

"Nice-lookin' little ship, eh?" said a

voice, and he turned his head to see a tall, hard-faced man in poorly fitting clothes standing beside him. The man was smiling ingratiatingly.

"Peach," Tex answered. "Those boches knew more about building ships than all the Allies put together. This little baby was king of the front for a long while."

"You're MacDowell, aren't you?" inquired the man as his cold blue eyes traveled over the stanch little plane.

"Uh huh, but you have the advantage of me."

"My name is Beers. Glad to meet yuh."

Tex took his hand and gave his new acquaintance a quick appraisal meanwhile.

"Heard a lot about you," continued Beers, whose big hands, tanned face and uncityfied clothes marked him as an outdoor man. "That was a good one you pulled off on old Dave Fitzpatrick!"

He laughed boisterously and some of the group, which included a few women, joined in.

"Entirely unintentional," Tex told him.

Captain Baird approached swiftly in a motor-cycle.

"All ready, MacDowell," yelled the captain as he came up in a cloud of dust.

"Rarin' to go," replied Tex, stuffing some cotton in his ears.

"The D. H.'s will take off in a minute. Take off right after them and keep the crowd amused. When the formation comes over the field get out of the way and wait till you see them go off north. Then do some more stunts until the formation lands. Understand?"

Tex nodded and the captain tore away.

"Got to get busy," Tex told Beers, who was still beside him. "See you some more."

"Sure!" replied Beers heartily.

As the first De Haviland taxied from the line toward the end of the field Tex climbed into the cockpit and the mechanics started the six-cylinder Mercedes. Leaving it at idling speed, MacDowell watched the formation planes. In a long line they went to the end of the field and then lined up, noses pointing down the field. They were in perfect alignment. Major Walters in number one took off. As soon as his wheels left the ground number two followed, and the others went through the same procedure. In a few seconds the roar of twelve Liberty motors filled the air with a vast droning hum as the formation, in single file, circled the field.

No sooner was the last plane off the ground than Tex was taxiing up the field for the take-off. It was so hot he was flying without coat or helmet, and the sleeves of his O. D. shirt were rolled to the elbow. His eyes sparkled as he waited for the formation to leave the field and get lined up for the exhibition. It had been many months since he had had an opportunity to fly one of the wonderful little German planes and as his eyes took in the crowds he knew he was up to an exhibition that would provide somewhat of a "kick" for the occasion.

IN A moment the long line of De Havilands circled away from the field. Tex gave the sturdy, smooth-running Mercedes the full throttle. Like a bullet the Fokker was on its way, tail high in the air. It looked like a bug beside the great bombers of a moment before.

When the wheels left *terra firma* Tex pushed forward on the stick a little more and forced the plane to stay less than a foot above the ground. As he flashed past the grand stand, where the general and a large party of notables, civilian and military, were sitting, he pulled up in a steep climbing turn. Excess speed sent the little ship almost straight up in the air, banking slowly as it shot up until it was actually sideslipping upward. It lost speed, hovered on the tip of one wing, and started dropping toward the ground. As it dropped Tex brought his controls to neutral slowly and the ship straightened, tipped the ground with the wheels and shot forward again with renewed speed.

For three minutes the Fokker never got higher than two hundred feet and every few seconds it was scraping the ground. Like a leaf in the wind it hovered, dipped, fluttered downward and always it came level before the seemingly inevitable crash happened. It was so effortlessly graceful that it seemed the ship was a living thing, and the breathless onlookers almost forgot the marvelous judgment of speed and distance that was responsible for that exhibition. MacDowell's handling of the Fokker approached perfection as the crowd watched the ship that they could often almost touch, so close it was.

Out of the corner of his eye Tex saw the formation coming toward the field. He dived steeply and then pulled up his ship in a steep zoom that carried it three hundred feet in the air. With nose pointed skyward it hung for a breathless instant and then, settling slightly, shot over the field. Tex put it in a normal climb and in a minute or two was roosting above the field again, but three thousand feet high. He throttled the motor to cool it after its recent close-to-the-ground efforts and watched the scene below.

The field glared almost white in the sunlight, the row of cars on one side looking like a mourning-band along the edge. The serried ranks of toy-like soldiers were straight and motionless and the gleam of their banners in the sunlight could be seen plainly even from his height in the miraculously clear, golden air. El Paso seemed but a stone's throw from the field and Fort Bliss was but a small settlement as the Fokker, even with throttled motor, still carried him higher.

The De Havilands had approached the field in four V's of three ships each, the key-men of each V lined perfectly. They stretched and contracted into various formations—from a large single V back to a straight line, then into bombing formation, into a diamond of three-ship Vs. Two-ton ships, going a hundred miles an hour, with no way to regulate speed quickly but only the choice of diving out of the way if a ship overran—and yet with less than twenty-five feet separating ship from ship—the roaring De Havilands ever held their formation. Tex did not wonder that they hesitated to use an unrehearsed pilot, for that precise formation below was a flying masterpiece of airwork so accurate, throttle-handling so delicate, that only an expert could appreciate it.

Tex, as he waited for his signal to stunt down, was in most excellent fettle. Unless he was badly mistaken, the awkward Mr. Beers would prove to have some interesting suggestions to make when the Fokker taxied up to the line, and the duel with Dave Fitzpatrick would start. With a flashing stunt ride in the Fokker before him, and the possibility of Mr. Beers to make life interesting after that, Tex asked no more of the gods for the present.

He would have been more or less than human if Natalie's presence below had not lent additional spice to the forthcoming exhibition. Tex surveyed the strong, thick-edged wings of his little craft with affectionate approbation. Twist and strain that little bus as he might, it would stand it and the sturdy Mercedes would keep on as long as the gas lasted.

Below, the De Havilands swept across the field for the last time, and as the last one cleared the crowd thousands of heads tilted back and the hovering Fokker became the center of interest. To ninety-nine non-flyers out of a hundred, aerial acrobatics represent the acme of skill on the pilot's part; the utmost in grace, for the ship; the most delightfully breathless of thrills for the onlooker. And Tex proceeded to supply the waiting crowd with what they craved.

A mere speck against the blue, the Fokker went into three successive loops and then without any interval toppled off into a whirling tailspin that brought the little ship down two thousand feet in a few seconds. Using the speed of the dive out, it went up and over in another loop, and then fluttered down once more, this time in a falling leaf. Three barrel-rolls, and then a roll and a half that left the little scout on its back. Another loop and four Immelman turns, all following so closely on one another that to the motionless onlookers the little ship seemed an aerial outlaw striving to shake off its master.

The last Immelman brought the Fokker down to three thousand feet. As it flipped over on its back it did not lose speed and dive out again. This time the stick went forward and in a bullet-like dive the Fokker shot across the field upside down. It tilted, and twisted downward in the most difficult and daring stunt known to acrobatics—the "outside" or upside-down spiral. In a sweeping circle, with motor cut, it swept earthward, Tex plainly discernible as he hung on his belt, head down.

The stunned crowd thought that there was nothing left that could compare with that rush downward, but Tex for the moment was inspired. At a thousand feet, still upside down, he was over the edge of the field. He pulled back on the stick and in a terrific vertical dive headed downward. The motor was still throttled, but at two hundred miles an hour he literally flashed over the boundary fence and shot along above the ground. Suddenly the ship veered in a terrific skid, compounded of frightful speed and sudden application of full rudder. The ship actually traveled fifty yards, it seemed, sidewise. It veered again, speed nearly gone, and landed without a bounce.

The first De Haviland landed as the Fokker reached the line, but the applause drowned even the roar of the Liberty. It had taken, perhaps, three minutes for the whole exhibition, but what a three minutes for those watching landsmen!

Tex was rolling a cigaret as Beers reached his side.

"First time I ever see a ship backed up!" grinned the newcomer.

MacDowell, lounging easily against the fuselage, lighted his cigaret and then wiped some of the oil from his face with his handkerchief.

"It's like handling a feather to fly this baby," he said and started to answer a frantic summons from the big car which held Natalie.

"Seen you in at the Del Norte," remarked Beers, walking along beside him. "See you in there tonight, maybe."

Tex grinned, even teeth flashing white across his oil-blackened face.

"Sure. I'll be looking for you," he answered.

"My suspicions of Beers sure got no setback through his last remarks," Tex soliloquized gleefully as he approached Natalie's party. "Ayres is sure an angel in overalls to put me wise."

OUTBURSTS of enthusiasm from his friends greeted him. Even Ransom joined in with congratulatory remarks.

"Shucks, that Fokker flies itself," Tex said, smiling at Natalie, whose eyes were still ablaze with excited admiration. He did not show the sudden embarrassment that came over him.

"If you people would like to see the ship Dave and I would be tickled to death to show you her points," he said, looking at Ransom.

"Let's do it," exclaimed the good-looking Miss Bennett, who was at the wheel of the car.

The little group got out and made their way toward the little gray scout.

"Tex, you and Dave are coming to the Bennetts' tonight for dinner, and then to the theater," Natalie told him.

"I sure hate to disobey orders, beautchous gel, but I e'en must," Tex replied.

Natalie stopped in her tracks and looked at him accusingly.

"Has your refusal got anything to do with—Dave?"

"Not a thing!" the flyer assured her. "It's just something I've got to do tonight, Natalie. If you won't get all fussed up about it and should happen to invite me some other night while we're here I'd sure like to come."

Natalie was not satisfied, but said nothing more. Dave was pointing out the extremely thick entering edges of the Fokker wings as they rejoined the group, hiding very successfully the fact that he had never been close to one before. Even to an amateur, the strength of the one-section wings, tubular iron bracing struts and the similarly constructed engine bed, was obvious.

"Greatest ship ever built, so far," Tex told them. "Handles as if it had brains built into it."

As one of the white-flanneled youths learnedly expounded the German appellations on the instruments in the cockpit MacDowell got a chance to speak to Dave.

"When you get in tonight, you might ask at the desk where I am," he said. "Unless I'm badly mistaken I've been talking to a gazaboo that's had an earful from Fitzpatrick. Of course I'd never have thought of it if it hadn't been for Ayres, but if you want to see the fun in case there is any I'll be sure and leave word where I am. I'd like to have you sit in."

Ransom's sensitive, mobile face went red.

"I—I'm sorry I've made that date, but I don't see how——"

"Don't think of breaking it, old man. Probably nothing will come off anyway, but there's a chance."

"But if you have any suspicion of anybody, you can steer clear of them anyway. I don't see——"

"If there's anything I admire to see, it's the biter get bitten," drawled Tex.

Ransom had no chance to ask for further details, for the others joined them to go back to the car. As they walked back the din of auto horns, the roaring of the De Haviland motors and the hurly-burly of a crowd's disintegration made conversation impossible. If he could have guessed what was in MacDowell's mind he would have been a very much surprized young man, for Tex was planning to stick his head in the lion's mouth—on the chance of swallowing the lion.

VIII

THE Del Norte roof-garden is high and cool and it was there that Tex and Beers foregathered, at Beers' invitation that Tex have dinner with him. The flyer was immaculate from his shining boots to his crisply waving hair. The ribbons on his blouse in a long line beneath the double wing of the pilot lent a touch of distinction to his uniform.

The meal was excellent, and Tex enjoyed it to the full while he took in Beers' identification of himself as an ex-cow-hand, now a cattle-buyer from St. Louis, and sundry descriptions of the good times that Juarez held in store for any one who was thoroughly familiar with its more hidden virtues. Tex announced solemnly that he was in for any good time and a tentative trip across the river had been agreed on.

"Ever play any poker?" queried Beers as the parfaits were set before them.

"Some. I suppose you indulge occasionally."

The hard-faced Mr. Beers laughingly admitted that he did.

"I was thinking we might get up a little game tonight if you have nothing better to do. I met a couple o' fellows I know a little while ago and they're pinin' for action."

The light in MacDowell's eyes could have been taken as the joy of a gambler at the prospect of a game and yet his reply was not the prompt acceptance that might have been presupposed.

"Well, it's like this with me," he said, meditatively stirring his parfait with the long spoon. "When I play poker I like to play—real action, you know. And I've only got a couple of hundred dollars with me. Naturally checks wouldn't be acceptable among strangers."

"All right with me, boy. And I can speak for the others. You're the kind of a man I like to see—win all or lose all, eh?"

"That's me!" stated Tex with marked appreciation of the compliment implied in Beers' remark. Inwardly he was thinking:

"First gun is to try to get me financially embarrassed. Wouldn't I look pretty accounting for a bunch of bad checks or unpaid gambling-debts?"

The prospect did not seem to bother him.

One of Mr. Beers' friends proved to be a well-dressed young Mexican, although Beers assured MacDowell that he was Spanish. The other member of the quartet that gathered in Beers' room was a small, neutral-looking man of middle age who might have been a clerk, were it not for gnarled hands and pronouncedly bowed legs.

Tex took the seat nearest the door into the hall. When every one was seated and two new decks of cards were produced, the question of banker arose, with Beers a prompt volunteer.

"The lieutenant, bein' a *hombre* that likes to play 'em high when he gets 'em, and bein' prepared to the extent of only two hundred bucks in cash, had my assurance that checks would be O. K. The rest of us have cash, I guess," and Beers looked around questioningly, as he finished counting out four hundred-dollar stacks of chips.

"It ees satisfactory to me, *señor*," smiled the dapper Mexican with a beautiful display of shining ivory. Mr. Searles, the bow-legged man, grunted assent.

Beers leaned toward Tex confidentially as he shoved over his stack.

"In case you should get shy of dough I'll stake you, boy," he said. "Your I. O. U. will be all right with me. That's the kind of a sport I am, when I cotton to a man."

"Thanks," returned Tex gravely. "I may call on you if luck don't run at the start."

For the first hour the game was rather slow. Tex, alert as a cat at a rat-hole, could catch nothing crooked. His expert eye had failed to detect any markings on the cards, nor had any of the trio done anything suspicious. He himself was a hundred dollars ahead and the Mexican was likewise on the right side of the ledger. At eight o'clock Beers produced three quarts of bonded whisky, but Tex did not imbibe.

It was a silent game, there being practically no conversation aside from the business of the evening. All three of his competitors knew the game from A to Z. Had it not been for the need of unceasing vigilance, Tex would have enjoyed the game thoroughly for its own sake. As it was, there was a constant feeling of expectation within him that kept his interest from flagging.

The joy of fighting against odds that was so much a part of him showed plainly in the sparkling gray eyes that unobtrusively followed every move of his silent companions. He would have sworn that he was cast for the rôle of a lamb and the fact that he was constantly adding to the chips in front of him did not cause his mind to wander from the main issue.

"Time for another drink," stated Beers finally. "Better have one this time to celebrate, MacDowell."

He squinted at the big stake of multicolored chips piled in front of the Texan. His wide, thin mouth stretched into a grin that was meant to be humorous, but the cold blue eyes did not change expression.

"No thanks," returned Tex.

"And I was offering to lend you money before the game," went on Beers as he poured three stiff drinks.

The Mexican, who was behind the game by this time, appraised the flyer's chips with an expert eye.

"The lieutenant is vair-ry good at the game," he stated with a quick smile.

Searles tossed off his drink quickly, wiped his mouth on a huge khaki-colored handkerchief, and then said dryly—

"Well, let's gamble."

A knock on the door caused Beers swiftly to hide the whisky-bottle underneath the table.

"I think it's Ransom—the fellow who is here with me," Tex said. "Mind if he comes in a minute?"

"Sure," replied Beers heartily. He raised his voice as he called—

"Come in."

RANSOM entered hesitantly.

"Sit down and look on a while, Dave," invited Tex, and a barely perceptible wink apprized Ransom that something was in the wind. Dave had pulled himself away from Natalie as quickly as was decently possible and the hotel clerk had told him where Tex was. He took a seat just behind MacDowell and watched the game silently.

For a half-hour the play proceeded with scarcely a ripple. Tex was over three hundred dollars ahead, Beers perhaps half as much to the good. It came Beers' deal. He was sitting on MacDowell's left. As he finished his shuffle and prepared to deal, his elbow knocked a stack of chips to the floor.

"——!" remarked Beers without heat as he bent down to pick them up.

The Mexican leaned over at the same moment and together they salvaged the chips. The table spoiled MacDowell's view, but his suspicious mind leaped to the conclusion that it would be wise to watch the next hand closely. He lighted a cigaret nonchalantly, feeling Searles' watchful eyes on him. He did not glance toward the other two, but turned to Ransom.

"We haven't had much action so far, Dave," he said, his eyes boring into Ransom's. "Something's due to break pretty quick, though, I hope."

The Mexican shrugged his shoulders as Beers started the deal.

"You nevair can tell," he smiled.

Searles picked up his cards without remark; he had not uttered a hundred words aside from calling his cards or announcing his bets, since the start of the evening.

With Ransom leaning over his shoulder, Tex picked up his cards. Was it imagination, or did the deck feel just a trifle smoother and fresher than before? He looked at his cards one by one, riffling them out slowly. Four aces stared him in the face.

"That well-known act, 'Lambie and the Wolves,' has started," Tex thought joyfully and one elbow lovingly touched the Colt .45 stuck deep in the waistband of his breeches, hidden effectively by his blouse. He didn't know yet what he would do, but if worst came to worst the Colt would be a very present help in time of trouble.

"Open, for ten," announced the Mexican.

"And fifty," stated Searles laconically.

He scratched his head with a stubby forefinger, carefully smoothed down the sparse sandy hair that covered it and looked at Tex expectantly.

Tex lounged easily in his chair, but his mind was working like lightning. Unless he was badly mistaken, the deck had been switched while Beers and the Mexican were picking up the chips. There was only one hand that could beat him—a straight flush. Who would hold that hand and would it be pat or not? If it were pat it would be too raw, decided the flyer as he riffled his hand thoughtfully and fingered his chips, apparently hesitating as to what to do. The room was silent as the grave. Ransom's eyes were blazing, his face without color. The other three betrayed no signs of excitement, nor did Tex himself.

"I raise that a hundred," he said finally and threw in his chips.

"Action has arrived," said Beers softly, his lined face a mask. "The ante goes up five hundred pesos on my hand."

"*Sacre!*" exploded the Mexican. "Too much!"

"Ditto!" Searles likewise threw in his hand.

It was between Beers and MacDowell and Tex swiftly decided that Beers had a four-card straight flush. They would probably figure him to draw one card to his four aces. By having the two cards on top of the deck fitting in on either end of the straight flush, Beers would make his hand whether Tex drew or stood pat. It was a whale of a frame-up, if true, unless——

"I can draw my check for some thirteen hundred dollars," drawled Tex, while Ransom listened in amazement. "That raises you eight hundred."

"Called," said Beers, producing a large roll of yellowbacks. "And I'm willing to take your I. O. U. up to two thousand, if you're game."

"If I should lose, it would take me at least six months to pay it, although I've got a few assets I might realize on," hesitated Tex.

The Mexican leaned over the table eagerly, his snapping black eyes fixed on the flyer.

"Be the sport, lieutenant," he urged.

Searles puffed tranquilly on a brown cigaret.

"All right. Let's see, and I've got close to three hundred dollars in chips yet."

He counted them.

"Two hundred and ninety. I'll make out the check and the I. O. U. now."

In dead silence he made out the required documents, throwing the assortment into the middle.

"Let's see—that makes me owe two thousand, two hundred and ninety dollars," Beers said.

He counted his roll swiftly.

"Will you lend me five hundred, Searles? I'll give you a check if I lose."

Searles counted out the money—a hundred dollars of it in gold. It was added to the pot and Beers picked up the deck.

"Any cards?" he asked.

MacDowell, his eyes boring into the cold blue ones that held no hint of expression, slowly drew two cards from his hand.

"Yes—I need two," he said softly.

With a sibilant hiss the Mexican drew in his breath, his eyes stealing toward the motionless Beers. Ransom literally forgot to breathe. He had not the least idea what MacDowell's object was in making that crazy draw, but the showdown was only a few seconds away.

Beers wet his lips with his tongue and a dull flush stained his leathery cheeks.

"Two, did you say?"

"Two," repeated Tex, his eyes still fixed on the other man.

Slowly Beers dealt the cards, taking one himself.

"My hand is three aces," said Tex, and spread it.

He had drawn an eight and a king of hearts, which would have filled either end of a nine-queen straight flush in hearts. Beers hesitated.

"I didn't fill," he said huskily and threw in his hand.

Like a flash Tex was on his feet, the Colt in his hand. He was taking no chances.

"Scoop in that pot, Dave," he said, without taking his eyes from the men at the table. They were looking at him with almost ludicrous surprize.

"Put your hands on the table—all of you!" snapped Tex.

They obeyed silently. The Mexican's face was a study in impotent rage, his eyes pools of malice.

"Put the kale in your pocket and count the chips, will you, Dave?" Tex went on.

Ransom quickly completed the operation.

"Seven hundred and ten dollars," he announced, his voice shaking a little.

"Now if you don't mind finding out whether they have guns, old man, before he cashes those chips, we'll get out of here quick."

BEERS had no gun, nor did the Mexican. Searles, however, was carrying a long-barreled six-shooter. This was laid on the chiffonier, out of harm's way.

Beers counted out the money for the chips without emotion. Not a word had been spoken by the three gamblers since Beers' hand had gone into the discard. He handed the money to Ransom. Together the flyers backed to the door, the Colt still with its business-end foremost. At the door Tex paused a moment.

"I don't know what your right names are," he drawled, leaning easily against the wall. "But for the sake of your self-respect and to alibi yourselves to Fitzpatrick when you report, I'll just mention that my partner and I knew several days ago that Fitzpatrick was gunning for us and some of his methods are well known. I came here tonight like Daniel into the lions' den and I waited for you to start something so long I thought maybe you-all might be straight.

"Then you switched decks and I made a lucky stab, figured your game right, and didn't have to call on the Colt except to make things safe. In case you have any idea of making a squeal about all this kale we've got, just remember that we have friends on the outside that put us wise to your game before you started, so I figured you'd better grin and bear it. So long—and thanks."

As they closed the door behind them MacDowell's last impression was of the imperturbable Mr. Searles looking straight at him, the most unreadable of expressions in his eyes.

As they walked down the hall Tex explained his coup to Ransom.

"Of course if I'd figured wrong I'd have pulled the gun and accused them of switching decks—a sure shot after I'd cocked a snook at my four bullets. Much better this way—a couple of thousand better!"

"I'll say it is!"

"Your help was sure opportune—gave me all the trumps to have a friendly witness at my right hand, to say nothing of an ally in a scrape."

"I—I'm glad if I helped along any," said Ransom awkwardly as they entered the elevator.

"You sure did. I'll be looking forward to the next few days being quite interesting with you to help me double-cross these Fitzpatrick thugs. Of course we can't be sure, but from the looks of them when I mentioned the old bird's name, that shot struck the bull's-eye. Round one in favor of the Army, eh?"

"By a knockout!" grinned Ransom as they stepped out of the lift into the crowded lobby.

As they walked toward the desk Tex, strange to say, was thinking less of Fitzpatrick than he was of Ransom.

"Hope it keeps up," reflected Tex as he made ready to deposit his surplus cash in the hotel safe. "Ransom's acting as if I were almost human!"

IX

THE days that followed were unsatisfactory. Beers, Searles and Señor Aldez disappeared, nor was there a ripple in the smooth surface of life to indicate that Fitzpatrick was still on the warpath. And Ransom, whom Tex thought had almost decided to let bygones be bygones, went back to his former attitude of aloofness and dislike. The two McMullenites had gone riding with Natalie one afternoon and a thoughtless remark of MacDowell's to Natalie, regarding some of the strange effects of booze, caused Dave to think that Natalie had heard the story of that day in Arilla, and that she and Tex were laughing at him.

Miserable and angry, the young observer drew into his shell and made himself so disagreeable that the afternoon was far from pleasant for any of them. Tex nearly spoke his mind to Ransom that day, but the memory of his promise to Captain Kennard held him back. And for the remainder of their stay in El Paso he avoided Natalie as far as possible and left Dave a clear field.

All these things were running through the pilot's head as he sent the De Haviland across the Big Bend on the way back to McMullen. Their duty at El Paso was completed and they were homeward bound. Tex was some two thousand dollars richer, but nevertheless he was not enjoying the trip back. He had failed with Ransom and there could be no alternative for Captain Kennard when they returned. Ransom would have to go. And despite his attitude Ransom was a likable fellow, reflected the pilot. It would set the seal on his misery to be ordered away from McMullen, a failure.

A slight unevenness in the steady roar of the motor brought MacDowell's attention back to his work with a snap. It was not a miss, but there was a slowly increasing vibration which was obvious in contrast to the former even rhythm. A glance at his instruments showed nothing wrong. He bent his head inside the cockpit and listened again. Was it imagination or not? Every cylinder was firing, anyhow, but there seemed to be an unsteadiness about the tiny intervals between explosions that sounded ominous.

He looked downward, striving to locate himself exactly. About sixty miles from Sanderson, he thought. Back of them was the most deserted and dangerous strip of the border. They were flying at eight thousand feet, nearly a thousand feet above the high-piled, snowy cumulous clouds that hung seemingly motionless in the air. They splotched the green of the endless mesquite, which covered the rolling mountains that were lower here than farther west, but nevertheless wild and forbidding. Southward the river twisted and turned in a tiny silver thread. There were isolated shacks visible, whether inhabited or not no one could tell.

Soon the airdrome at Sanderson, spread at the foot of the mountains, came into sight. After they landed Tex and some mechanics looked over the motor carefully and ran it wide open for a moment while husky mechanics sat on the tail and held the wings to keep the powerful bomber from leaping the blocks on the wheels.

"Listens to me like a little error in the timing," stated Hub Chester, the engineer officer, and his chief mechanic nodded. "We can check her up, if you like, but you can't make McMullen tonight unless we're lucky in finding the trouble quick."

"I think we'll jazz on," decided Tex. "She'll carry us back all right and we've been held up two or three days already on account of that review down at Fort Bliss. They need us back in McMullen."

"She'll go all right," agreed Chester. "Just a little more vibration due to the uneven firing."

But the engineer officer was wrong. For a while the great ship carried on and at six thousand feet appeared to be making normal speed. The vibration was bad, but there was no miss. Without warning, except for a sudden splutter, the motor simply quit firing.

The sudden silence was a shock. With a heartfelt curse Tex nosed down to keep up speed, and surveyed the landing prospects. The river—that meant a sure wreck, possible crippling of one or both. That was better than the mesquite, however. With straining eyes Tex strove to find some tiny cleared space, and could not, until finally, his ship down to three thousand feet now, he decided for the river.

As he headed toward it his eye caught a very long, extremely narrow field that had looked as if it were mesquite. It was on the Mexican side of the river. As he dived closer it looked as if that cleared space was covered with low brush instead of mesquite. There was no shack visible, but the field, if it was a field, was four hundred yards long.

With leaping hope Tex gathered himself together to shoot for it.

"Throw up your goggles—we may crack!" he yelled to Ransom, whose drawn face was set and white.

The observer obeyed quickly and then hunched down behind the wind-shield in the back seat to save his eyes.

With an expert eye, as his ship dropped to fifteen hundred feet, Tex surveyed his prospective landing-place. It was better than he had thought, unless there were hidden ditches in it. He spiraled down to eight hundred feet, at which point he was about over the river, headed for the field, which ran north and south, one end being about three hundred yards from the river-bank.

The slowest possible landing was advisable—no telling what those low, tangled bushes hid to ambush a ship going seventy miles an hour. As slowly as possible he forward-slipped for the field, and fifty feet back and a hundred feet high he drew the nose up level and started the skilful stalling for which he was famous. He kept the ship dropping level by consummately delicate control, literally foreseeing what the ship would do.

Being without flying-speed, it was on the verge of dropping off into a spin or a nose-dive at any given moment. In a few seconds, dropping faster and with only slight forward speed, the landing-gear hit the ground just as the nose was about to drop. The dragging brush kept it from bouncing very high, but both tires burst with a loud report. It came to rest not twenty-five yards from the place it had hit, undamaged save for two useless tires.

Tex unstrapped his belt and perched himself on the fuselage.

"Talk about luck!" he remarked as he rolled a cigaret.

"And flying," added Ransom grudgingly.

Inexperienced as he was, yet even he could realize that had it not been for that superlatively skilful stall landing the tangled weeds would have caught the landing-gear and turned the ship upside down. What would have happened to the occupants in that event was a matter of conjecture, but anything up to death itself would be a good bet.

Tex surveyed the long, narrow field, surrounded on all four sides by scrubby chaparral.

"Unless there's a ditch or something in this field we can take off, I think. Providing, of course, that we can fix the ship. I wonder what in —— is the matter with it? Must be either the gas-line or the ignition to make it go dead like that."

"We have no tires and this brush is so thick we can't get up speed," objected Ransom.

"We can take off on the rims, and as for this brush I think one of those logs on the bank of the river may help us."

Tex threw helmet and goggles into the front cockpit and hopped from his lofty seat to the ground.

"Uh huh, its pretty brittle," he said after wading around in it for a moment. "By getting hold of a log and rolling it along we can mat down a hundred-yard strip so that we can take off, I think. Let's see what happened to the motor."

AT JUST about the time Ransom was climbing out to help, a rider, ten miles away, was starting for the place where he had seen the ship come down. Had the flyers known that fact and the identity of the rider they would not have been as cheerful as they were when they opened the side-flap of the motor cowling and discovered the trouble.

"I sure said a mouthful when I mentioned luck," remarked Tex complacently as he surveyed the broken gas-line which stared them in the face. The gas-line from the tank to the carburetors, a quarter-inch copper tubing, had broken, cutting off the gas flow completely.

"Evidently the metal had started to crystallize and the extra vibration broke it at the weak spot," Tex explained. "With that adhesive tape in the tool-kit we can mend it well enough to get on to Del Rio. If we can, it'll just save us a fifty-mile, more or less, walk over the most deserted pimple on the face of the earth that I know about."

It was but the work of a few minutes to piece the ends together, wire them with safety wire from the tool-kit, and then wrap the gas-line six inches on either side of the break with many overlapping folds of adhesive tape.

"That's got it," said Tex, surveying his work with satisfaction. "Now for the real dirty work. Trundling a log in this heat is going to make two grease-spots out of us, but it's got to be done. I need a smoke first."

They dropped on the ground in the shade of a wing and lighted cigarets. The drowsy hum of myriad insects filled the air. The gnats which had been bothering them were temporarily routed by the smoke, and both airmen leaned back restfully.

Ransom was silent, seemingly absorbed in thoughts of a pleasant nature, if the expression on his face was any criterion. Tex glanced at him from the corner of his eye, and then flicked the ash from his cigaret.

"Ransom, I swore I'd never bring up the subject again, but I'm going to. I've apologized several times for what I did up in Arilla and I'm going to say again right here that I know I made a fool of myself up there, and I'm sorry. I've tried every way in the world to show you that I want to be a friend of yours, without any success. Everybody at McMullen likes you, Ransom, but you and I are worrying Captain Kennard to death. In a small outfit like ours, if two men can't get along it makes things as unpleasant as ——; you know that. And I know —— well that unless you and I can get together that one of us will have to leave the flight, for the good of the outfit. What do you say, Dave—shall we quit holding the old grudge and both stick around McMullen a while longer? Of course, I'm not suggesting that we forget things just to stay with the flight. It would make me feel a lot better if you'd take what I say at face value and shake because you really wanted to."

Tex was grinning as he said the last words and held out his hand toward Ransom. The fiery young observer's face had gone red and then white as MacDowell was speaking and it was his stubborn pride that showed through as he retorted—

"Oh, of course, the famous Tex MacDowell couldn't be spared from McMullen!"

Tex withdrew his hand slowly. For a second he was on the point of giving way to his disgust, but what he said was—

"So you're not backing down any, Ransom?"

"No, I'm not, and I'll say again what I've told you before!" flared Ransom. "You thought you were —— smart up in Arilla and you got away with it. But if you think just because you're Tex MacDowell that

I'm coming crawling around to lick your hand just to stay at McMullen you've got another think coming! I haven't changed my opinion of you a —— bit. You can keep on telling everybody from Natalie Brewster down about how smart you were and what a clever stunt you pulled with me as goat——"

"That'll be about all, Ransom."

The words were soft, but there was something deadly in them. The pilot's eyes as they met Ransom's were blazing with such searing wrath that the observer instinctively shrank away, the words he would have uttered forgotten.

"Now we'll get that log," said Tex in level tones, and without a word the observer followed him toward the river.

Several sizable logs had been strewn along the banks, probably in one of the Rio Grande's infrequent but troublesome high-water rampages. Tex selected the largest of them, which was about eight inches thick and ten feet long. In utter silence the two flyers tugged and strained until they loosened it and then laboriously struggled up the embankment. Together they carried it to the field.

Tex gave no inkling of whatever his thoughts may have been, but Ransom's face reflected the complete misery that was within him. It had come—the beginning of the end of his career as a border-patrol flyer, and right then there was nothing in the world that could compensate him for the failure that deep in his heart, unadmitted even to himself, ke knew that he alone was responsible for.

They placed the log in front of the landing-gear wheels. Tex figured that there was room enough to take off from where the ship was sitting, so they began to roll the log up the field. It matted down a ten-foot strip of brush surprisingly well. To make sure, they rolled the log backward over the same lane, working in absolute silence.

Breathless and dripping with perspiration, they finally rolled the timber out of the way. Ransom flopped down on it and wiped away some of the moisture from his crimsoned face with his sleeve. Tex surveyed the swath with an expert eye. It would be a fairly easy task to keep the ship going straight down the cleared trail, but in order to take no chances on the brush on either side he got a wrench from the toolkit and quickly took off the wing skids.

The half-oval braces, attached to the under side of each lower wing out near the tip, are for protection in the event of a ship's tipping up sidewise on the ground in a ground-loop or quick turn. The skids might possibly catch in the weeds and hinder the take-off.

"We'll have to carry that log back over here for a wheel-block," remarked Tex disgustedly. "Let's go."

Ransom got up and helped set the log under the wheels. Tex climbed into the cockpit, turned on the gas petcocks, set both switches at contact, pumped up the air-pressure and set throttle and spark. In lieu of turning over the prop to suck gas into the cylinders he primed the motor with three stiff shots of gas through the priming-pump.

"I'd better take the outside—I'm heavier and can pull you better," said Tex and Ransom nodded listlessly.

Tex took hold of one of Ransom's hands and the observer set himself with feet apart and his other hand on the propeller. With Tex counting "one—two—three," they swayed back and forth on the first two counts and then on three Ransom pulled the seven-foot propeller through, Tex jerking him out of the way. Due to the terrific heat of the sun's rays the motor was not at all cool, and with a sputter it caught on the first try. Tex leaped for the cockpit, shut off the throttle a trifle and listened to the steady hum of the Liberty with much satisfaction.

THE noise deadened the approach of the rider who had started for the stricken ship an hour and a half before and neither flyer noticed him as he tied his frightened horse to a mesquite tree at the edge of the clearing and walked toward the flyers. Tex was intent on the instruments in the cockpit as he tested the motor, and Ransom was carefully searching for any tools that might have been scattered on the ground.

Señor Aldez—for it was the Mexican who had participated in the poker game at the Del Norte—approached interestedly. He had expected to see a bad wreck—perhaps two dead Americans. The Mexican was spotless in khaki, riding-boots and ornate silver spurs, topped by a huge, filigreed sombrero. As he came within a few yards of the ship Ransom turned. Both men stood motionless for an instant—Ransom in consternation, Aldez in joyful surprize. He jerked his gun from the holster at his hip and walked toward Ransom with the weapon trained on him. His dark, handsome face was smiling, but there was a quality in that smile that was far from reassuring.

"I am ver' pleased that we meet again, *señor*," he said, raising his voice slightly.

The motor was still almost idling while Tex tried the switches and listened for any ill-effect from the patched gas-line. The Mexican was standing where he could keep an eye on both Ransom and the unaware pilot.

"Well, I can't say I am delighted to see you. Why the gun?" demanded the observer.

"In case you do not like to say yes to what I say," replied Aldez, still smiling.

Just then Tex turned and caught sight of the Mexican. He did not wait for any command. With a heartfelt curse he jerked back the throttle and vaulted out of the cockpit. Both his and Ransom's Colts were packed up in the rear cockpit and the Mexican's gun looked very business-like. He strolled with apparent nonchalance toward the wary Aldez, stopping beside Ransom ten feet in front of his erstwhile poker opponent.

"Greetings," he said with a grin. "Have you gone into the hold-up game to recoup your losses in El Paso?"

The Mexican's face lost its smile.

"Perhaps, *señor*. Señor Feetzpatrick will be ver' glad to see you—even more than to get back the money."

"I thought maybe Fitzpatrick might enter the game when I saw you. But how in —— did you happen to get down this way, or Fitzpatrick either?"

"There is a leetle shack we use sometimes. Señor Feetzpatrick is at Tia Nita, but he will be glad, I think, when I breeng you in."

"So you've got a little smuggling hang-out near here, eh?" drawled Tex.

"The *señor* theenks he is verry wise," replied Aldez venomously. "But I will take the money, and we will go. Hands up, *señores*."

Tex, grinning at the coming discomfiture of the Mexican, put up his hands nearly as quickly as Dave. It was a queer scene—the clearing, surrounded by mesquite, bathed in hot golden sunlight, insects droning tranquilly, and the three human actors standing quietly near the big De Haviland, two with their hands in the air. Except for the modern note struck by the plane, it might have been a Remington painting of the old West.

"Turn slowly," said the Mexican.

The flyers obeyed silently. The tight Army breeches and sweat-soaked shirts showed no signs of concealed guns.

"Empty your pockets," ordered Aldez, his gun trained on his two captives. "And I shoot vairry quickly. You are in Mexico now, *señores*."

He smiled with malicious enjoyment as he reminded them of the full possibilities of their predicament.

What followed was done so quickly, so unexpectedly, that it was over almost before it happened. It was like the strike of a rattlesnake. As Tex dropped his hands he was six feet in front of Aldez and half as far to one side of Ransom.

"I'm afraid you're going to be disappointed, *caballero*," he drawled, "because all that *dinero*——"

Without warning or any sign of setting himself, the tall flyer hurled himself forward and downward, straight at the Mexican. The gun went off as Aldez fell, MacDowell's arms clasping his knees. Ransom sprang to help and in five seconds both flyers were squatting breathlessly on the recumbent form of Fitzpatrick's henchman. Aldez poured forth a brief but blistering string of Spanish and then lapsed into silence. Tex stretched out a long arm and picked up the gun which had been knocked from the Mexican's hand when he fell.

"Now that it's over, I must apologize," remarked Tex to Ransom. "I never thought of the fact that chances were ten to one that if Aldez hit anybody with a bullet it would have been you. The prospect of spending a couple of days as Fitzpatrick's guest was so —— unpleasant I lost any sense I may have."

"That's all right," returned Dave. "Shall we let the spig up?"

Tex grinned.

"How about it, Aldez? Got another gun?"

A cursory examination failed to unearth anything but a knife which Tex confiscated.

"Go get in the ship, Ransom, and get strapped in. I'll hold Aldez down and then we can take off before he gets to his horse.

He may have another gun there. Can you sneak that log out of the way alone?"

Ransom succeeded in pulling the log from the wheels, and as soon as he waved that he was fixed Tex arose from his wriggling human couch and ran for the ship, tucking the revolver in his shirt as he ran. He climbed into the cockpit, turned on the throttle slowly and then fed the Liberty all the gas. With his head stuck out the side to watch his course he used his rudder to keep the De Haviland in the cleared path. The Liberty ran faultlessly and fifty yards from the trees on the boundary of the field was off the ground. As the ship turned eastward the flyers could see Aldez, motionless where they had left him.

His head was raised, his eyes on the plane. With a last derisive wave to his late enemy, Tex turned to his work. He kept circling the field as he watched his instruments. It was the only landing-place and it would be wise to keep close to it until the ship proved conclusively that everything was all right. As they went ever higher in widening circles the motor ran smoothly. The long idling of the motor on the ground had sent the temperature up to ninety centigrade—much too hot. Tex throttled down, made sure the motor shutters were open and glanced at the altimeter. They were two thousand feet high. The motor responded to the cool upper air and the thermometer went down gradually. Tex turned sharply and pointed the ship on its way eastward to Del Rio.

The motor vibrated a great deal, of course, but apparently the tape-connection in the gas-line would stand up for the sixty-mile trip to Del Rio, for the motor showed no sign of missing. As they sped on along the river, however, Tex kept a constant lookout for landing-fields. No telling when something might go wrong with all that vibration, if the accident to the gas-line was any criterion. If he had realized how bad it was he would never have left Sanderson. The timing error was not serious itself—it was only the effect on the numberless connections in gas, oil and water lines of the gradually increasing uneveness in firing.

HOWEVER, nothing went wrong, and in a half-hour Del Rio came in sight, twenty miles ahead. They were five thousand feet high now and for the first time since they had taken off Tex relaxed and took his eyes off the instruments before him.

"This has sure been some trip," he soliloquized. "All this trouble and not a —— thing accomplished so far as Ransom is concerned."

He wondered what Ransom was thinking about the whole affair. Probably the observer's thoughts were far from pleasant, reflected Tex, but when one has only himself to blame he doesn't rate much sympathy.

"These birds who can't admit it when they're wrong just naturally put their head in a noose and then kick over the barrel every time," he told himself philosophically.

A warning sputter came from the motor, and Tex jumped as if he had been shot. He looked ahead swiftly—the airdrome was nearly ten miles way. The motor caught again and for half a minute ran smoothly. The pilot leaned back with a sigh of relief, but it did not last long. A series of loud reports, almost like shots, came from the motor.

"Tape is working loose, the air is getting in and making the mixture lean and she's back-firing," thought Tex with the wisdom of a thousand hours in the air.

He adjusted the altitude lever to give as rich a mixture as possible to compensate, but the popping grew worse. However, if the motor would last a little longer they could make the airdrome.

Came a louder report, and a streak of flame shot from the exhaust pipes. Tex, quickly appraising altitude and distance to the airdrome, throttled down slightly and nosed over for a power glide. They could make it all right, if the motor would only last.

Whether it was the glide or not Tex never knew, but suddenly leaping flames covered the motor and smoke poured from the carburetors, set in between the two banks of cylinders. Mechanically the pilot banked steeply, threw on full top-rudder, and started slipping. The wave of heat which had come back in his face was diverted and the smoke poured upward. They were on fire—the most horrible hazard of the air and the only one which can bring unadulterated fear and despair into the heart of even the most experienced airman.

For a moment Tex thought that the fire was out. As they dropped in a steep slip toward the airdrome, it seemed that the heat lessened. He had turned off the gas pet-cocks and opened the throttle. Had the slip blown the fire out?

For a moment he was hopeful and then a fresh burst of smoke told the story. The upper wing, toward which the draft generated by the slip directed the flame, was beginning to smolder. As he fought to keep the ship banked, he was aware of ever increasing heat that was already blistering the wood in the cockpit. If only there was a stick in the back seat and Ransom could fly, he himself might perhaps climb out and shove a fire-extinguisher down into the carburetor. But if he should let go the controls for a moment the ship would go into a straight dive and the passengers would be cinders in a moment as the draft sent the flame backward.

As he fought blindly, without hope, a dim shape loomed beside him. Through smoke-bleared eyes he saw Ransom, face white and eyes flashing, inch himself by the front cockpit, on the upper side of the fuselage. Three thousand feet in the air, the young observer fought through the ever thickening smoke, gripping his hands around the edge of the cockpit. He reached the motor, head down and the sleeve on one arm already smoldering. Tex shoved the little hand-extinguisher into his groping hand. With one arm hooked around the center section strut, almost directly over the inferno of heat that was the motor, Ransom thrust the extinguisher between the cylinder banks and began to work the plunger.

Two thousand feet high now—a square foot of the upper right wing fabric had smoldered away. The ship rushed downward, tilted steeply. Half-unconscious from heat and smoke, Tex saw as in a dream that Ransom's sleeve had burned away from the arm which circled the strut, but still he worked the extinguisher and the smoke was getting lighter. Try as he would, the tortured pilot could not keep the heavy nose of the D. H. up with a dead motor any longer, and the forward slip sent the smoke and flame back on him.

A thousand feet high—Ransom was inert against the side of the fuselage, one foot thrust through the lower wing, left arm gripped convulsively around the strut, which was charred and smoldering.

On the airdrome below running figures danced crazily before the pilot's eyes. The wing was still smoldering, but the heat had grown less, although his feet, still locked against the rudder, were torturing him. His boots were smoking and the dashboard ahead of him next to the motor was charring through.

His last conscious thought was to straighten out the ship as it dropped diagonally across a hangar. He released the rudder, pulled back on the stick and as the tireless wheels hit the ground and crumpled up he drifted into unconsciousness—blessed surcease of pain.

X

THE rays of the sun sketched fantastic filigrees of light and shadow as it searched out the corners of the big room with its two lines of white-covered cots. Tex MacDowell, growing conscious of dull pain around his ankles, opened his eyes for the first time in twenty hours. As he looked around the room, apparently deserted save for a dozing orderly at the far end, a portion of the old smile was observable below a great white bandage over one side of his face.

"Still alive and together, eh?" he thought, and turned his head slightly. Ransom, even more bandaged than was Tex, still had one eye unexposed and he met the pilot's gaze from the next bed.

"Well, how are you, old-timer?" queried Tex in a husky whisper which was the best he could muster.

"Broken leg—pretty badly burned, but nothing serious. They say you'll be out in a couple of days," croaked Ransom, his voice muffled by his face bandage.

Tex was silent a moment. Only the buzzing of a stray fly broke the stillness. It was very muggy and hot and he felt as if his whole body, inside and out, was burning up.

"Dave, when you kept on working that extinguisher you pulled the nerviest stunt I ever saw. It was bad enough to get from the back seat to the wing, but when you let your arm get ——"

"And you brought us down—God!" whispered Ransom, shuddering a little as his thoughts went back to those awful moments.

The orderly slept on. Outside the door they could hear the low-voiced conversation of a woman and a man—probably a nurse and a doctor. Presently Ransom broke the silence.

"Tex, I've been a —— fool," he said.

MacDowell turned his head slowly, wincing a bit as a raw place on his cheek chafed beneath the bandage.

"O. K., boy. We understand each other, I guess. Let's forget it."

Their eyes met in complete understanding.

Dave told Tex that Captain Kennard, Hickman, Miller and Binder had all flown over that morning, and would be in to see them that afternoon. In the wreck of landing Tex had got a nasty bump on the head that had kept him unconscious for a long time.

They lapsed into silence again. Tex lay quietly, but Ransom occasionally moved uneasily.

"Tex," he said finally, his voice barely reaching MacDowell's ears, "there's something I want to tell you. I want you to know first; you'll understand. Natalie—promised to marry me the night before we left El Paso."

"All the congratulations there are, Dave. I'll tell you more about how lucky you are later, but croaking away with this —— flannel throat of mine is awful."

"Thanks," whispered Dave.

He lay quietly beneath the covers and in a moment had drifted off into a doze.

Tex eased himself over a trifle. He stared at the ceiling. So Natalie was to be married. What was the cause of that little stab of pain—or was it pain—that had gone through him at Ransom's announcement?

Ordinarily the least introspective of men, Tex nevertheless thought of himself for a while. Was he in love with Natalie or had that instinctive feeling been—well, pride, for instance? He thought of himself as a married man, even with so charming a life-partner as Natalie. A slow smile tugged at the corners of his mouth.

"And some moonlight night I might have asked, knowing no better at the time, and if Dave hadn't come along she might have said yes. I'd have roped and hog-tied myself as sure as shooting. A moonlight drunk is the worst in the world!" he reflected.

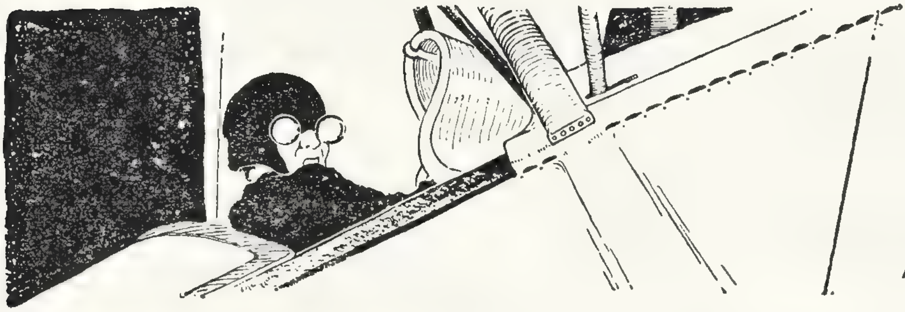
Tramping feet came to his ears. The footsteps were coming nearer—probably Captain Kennard and the rest of the bunch. His smile widened to a grin as he turned to look at the sleeping Ransom.

"Guess I'd better keep you around, Dave," he remarked to no one in particular. "I seem to need you to keep me out of trouble."

A minute later Captain Kennard was greeting him, with a small crowd of flyers, doctors and nurses pressing behind.

"I'm feeling fine," Tex assured them. "I thrive on narrow escapes."

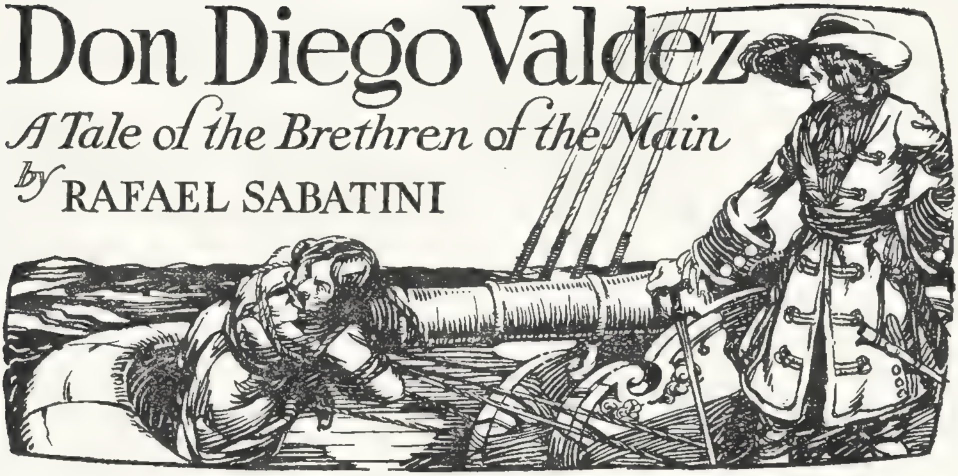
It is doubtful whether any of them knew exactly what he meant, even Ransom.



Don Diego Valdez

A Tale of the Brethren of the Main

by RAFAEL SABATINI



Author of "The Pretender," "Rebels Convict," etc.

DON DIEGO VALDEZ awoke, and with languid eyes in aching head he looked around the sunlit cabin. Then he closed his eyes again, and endeavored to think. But between the pain in his head and the confusion that he discovered in his mind, he found thought almost impossible.

An indefinite sense of alarm drove him to consider his surroundings yet again. There could be no doubt that he lay in the roundhouse of his own ship, the *Cinco Llagas*, so that his disquiet must be ill-founded.

And yet stirrings of memory coming now to the assistance of reflection compelled him uneasily to insist that here something was not as it should be. The position of the sun, flooding the cabin with golden light from the square window astern, suggested that it was early morning, unless indeed they were sailing eastward, in which case it would be late afternoon.

That they were sailing he could feel from the gentle forward heave of the vessel under him. And how did they come to be sailing, and he, the master, not to know whether their course lay east or west, not to be able to recollect whither they were bound?

His mind went back over the adventure of yesterday, if of yesterday it was. He was clear on the matter of the easily successful raid upon the Island of Barbados; every detail of it stood vividly in his memory up to the moment at which, returning aboard, he had stepped on to the deck.

He had brought the ransom of a hundred thousand pieces of eight, wrung from the defeated islanders, and his men had been following in eight boats that were laden also with plunder and provisions. That much he clearly remembered. But there memory abruptly ceased. It was as if he had fallen asleep at the moment of stepping from the ladder to the deck.

He was beginning to torture his mind with conjecture when the door opened, and to Don Diego's increasing mystification he beheld his best suit of clothes step into the cabin. It was a singularly elegant and characteristically Spanish suit of black taffeta with silver lace that had been made for him a year ago in Cadiz, and he knew each detail of it so well that it was impossible he could be mistaken.

The suit paused to close the door, then advanced toward the couch on which Don Diego was extended; and inside the suit came Mr. Peter Blood, a tall, slender gentleman of about Don Diego's own height and shape. Seeing the wide, startled eyes of the Spaniard upon him, Mr. Blood lengthened his stride.

"Awake, eh?" said he in Spanish.

The recumbent man looked up, bewildered, into a pair of light-blue eyes that regarded him out of a tawny, sardonic face set in a cluster of black ringlets.

Mr. Blood's fingers touched the top of Don Diego's head, whereupon Don Diego winced and cried out in pain.

"Tender, eh?" said Mr. Blood.

He took Don Diego's wrist between

thumb and second finger. And then at last the Spaniard spoke.

"Are you a doctor?"

"Among other things," was the cryptic answer.

Mr. Blood continued his study of the patient's pulse.

"A trifle intermittent," said he, and dropped the wrist.

Don Diego struggled up into a sitting position on the red-velvet couch.

"Who the —— are you?" he asked. "And what the —— are you doing in my clothes and aboard my ship?"

The level, black eyebrows went up.

"You are still delirious, I fear. This is not your ship. This is my ship, and these are my clothes."

"Your ship?" quoth the other, aghast; and, still more aghast, he added:

"Your clothes? But— Then——"

He stared, his eyes wild. Then he looked round the cabin once again, scrutinizing each familiar object.

"Am I mad?" he asked at last. "Surely this ship is the *Cinco Llagas?*"

"The *Cinco Llagas* it is."

"Then——"

The Spaniard broke off. His glance grew still more troubled.

"*Valga me Dios!*" he cried out like a man in anguish. "Will you tell me also that you are Don Diego Valdez?"

"Oh, no; my name is Blood—Captain Peter Blood. This ship, like this handsome suit of clothes, is mine by right of conquest. Just as you, Don Diego, are my prisoner."

STARTLING as was the explanation, yet it soothed Don Diego, being so much less startling than the things he was beginning to imagine.

"But—are you not Spanish, then?"

"You flatter my Castilian accent. I have the honor to be Irish. You were thinking that a miracle had happened. So it has—a miracle wrought by my genius, which is considerable."

And very succinctly now Captain Blood elucidated the mystery. Last night what time the two hundred and fifty Spaniards commanded by Don Diego were making merry in conquered Bridgetown Mr. Blood and some thirty forgotten plantation slaves—rebels convict all, who had been out with Monmouth in the West Country and as a consequence suffered transportation—had quietly slipped aboard the *Cinco Llagas*, overpowered the slight contingent which was guarding her with characteristic Spanish carelessness, and so possessed themselves of the ship.

"When you came aboard this morning with the ransom of a hundred thousand pieces of eight we tapped you over the head to keep you quiet. After that we hauled the treasure-chests aboard, and then proceeded to sink by gunfire the boats containing your marauding followers. That much successfully accomplished, and having no desire to return into slavery, we put to sea."

The Spaniard's countenance had gone red and white by turns during that brief narration. He had put a hand to the back of his head, and there discovered, in confirmation of the story, a lump as large as a pigeon's egg.

"And my son? What of my son?" he cried out. "He was with the gunner left on guard aboard."

"Your son is safe; he and the gunner and his crew—ten of them in all—are snugly in irons under hatches."

Don Diego sank back on the couch, his glittering, dark eyes fixed upon the tawny face of Captain Blood, and silently composed himself. After all, he had the stoicism proper to his desperate trade.

With the utmost composure he inquired—

"And now, *Señor Capitán?*"

"And now," said Captain Blood, "being a humane man, I am sorry to find that ye're not dead from the tap we gave you. For it means that you'll be put to the trouble of dying all over again."

"Is that necessary?" asked Don Diego without apparent perturbation.

Captain Blood's light-blue eyes approved his bearing.

"Ask yourself," said he. "Tell me, as an experienced and bloody pirate, what in my place should you do yourself?"

"Ah, but there is a difference."

Don Diego sat up to argue the matter.

"It lies in the fact that you boast yourself a humane man."

Captain Blood perched himself on the edge of the long oak table.

"But I am not a fool," said he, "and I'll not allow a natural Irish sentimentality to stand in the way of my doing what is necessary and proper. You and your ten surviving scoundrels are a menace on this ship. More than that, she is none so well found in water and provisions.

"True, we are fortunately a small number, but you and your party inconveniently increase it. So that on every hand, you see, prudence suggests to us that we should deny ourselves the pleasure of your company, and, steeling our soft hearts to the inevitable, invite you to take a walk along a plank."

"I see," said the Spaniard pensively.

He swung his legs from the couch, and sat now upon the edge of it, his elbows on his knees. He had taken the measure of his man, and met him now with a mock urbanity and a suave detachment that matched his own.

"I confess," he admitted, "that there is much force in what you say."

"You take a load from my mind," said Captain Blood. "I would not appear unnecessarily harsh, especially since I and my friends owe you so very much. For, whatever it may have been to others, to us your raid upon Barbados was most opportune. I am glad therefore that you agree that I have no choice."

"But, my friend, I did not agree so much."

"If there is any alternative that you can suggest I shall be most happy to consider it."

In thought Don Diego stroked his pointed black beard.

"Can you give me until morning for reflection? My head aches so damnably that I am incapable of thought. And this, you will admit, is a matter that asks for serious thought."

Captain Blood stood up. From a shelf he took a half-hour glass, reversed it so that the bulb containing the red sand was uppermost, and stood it on the table.

"I am sorry to press you in such a matter, Don Diego, but one glass is all that I can give you. If by the time those sands have run out you can propose no acceptable alternative I shall most reluctantly be driven to ask you to go over the side with your friends."

Captain Blood went out and locked the door.

Elbows on his knees and face in his hands, Don Diego sat watching the rusty sands run from the upper to the lower bulb. And as he watched, the lines in his lean, broad face grew deeper. Punctually as the last grains filtered through the door reopened.

THE Spaniard sighed and sat upright to face the returning Captain Blood with the answer for which he came.

"I have thought of an alternative, sir captain; but it depends upon your charity. It is that you put us ashore on one of the islands of this pestilent archipelago, and leave us to shift for ourselves."

Captain Blood pursed his lips.

"It has its difficulties," he said slowly.

"I feared it would be so."

Don Diego sighed again, and stood up.

"Let us say no more."

The light-blue eyes of Captain Blood played over him like points of steel.

"You are not afraid to die, Don Diego?"

The Spaniard threw back his head, a frown between his eyes.

"The question is offensive, sir."

"It is not so intended. Let me put it in another way, perhaps more happily—

"You do not desire to live?"

"Ah, that I can answer. I do desire to live; and even more do I desire that my son may live. But the desire shall not make a coward of me for your amusement, master mocker."

It was the first sign he had shown of the least heat or resentment.

Captain Blood did not directly answer. As before he perched himself on the corner of the table.

"Would you be willing, sir, to earn life and liberty—for yourself, your son and the other Spaniards who are on board?"

"To earn it?" said Don Diego; and the watchful Captain Blood did not miss the quiver that ran through him. "To earn it, do you say? Why, if the service you would propose is one that can not hurt my honor——"

"Could I be guilty of that?" cried the captain. "For I realize that even a pirate has his honor."

And he forthwith propounded his offer.

"If you will look from those windows, Don Diego, you will see what appears to be a faint cloud on the horizon. That is the island of Barbados well astern. All day we have been sailing east before the wind with but one intent—to set as great a distance between Barbados and ourselves as possible.

"But now, almost out of sight of land, we are in a difficulty. The only man among us schooled in the art of navigation is fevered, delirious in fact, as a consequence of certain ill-treatment he received ashore before we carried him away with us. I can handle a ship tolerably well in action, and there are one or two men of Devon aboard who can assist me; but in the higher mysteries of seamanship and of the art of finding our way over trackless wastes of the ocean we know nothing. To hug the land, and go blundering about what you so aptly call this pestilent archipelago is for us to court disaster, as you can perhaps conceive.

"And so it comes to this: We desire to make for the Dutch settlement of Curaçao as straightly as possible, there to victual our ship and invite adventurers to join us so as to make up a proper complement. Will you pledge me your honor if I release you upon parole that you will navigate us thither? If so we will either restore you and your surviving men to liberty upon arrival there, or if you prefer it carry you off again to put you ashore as you have suggested on one of the lesser isles."

Don Diego bowed his head upon his breast, and strode away in thought to the stern windows. There he stood looking out upon the sunlit sea and the dead water in the great ship's wake—his ship that these English dogs had wrested from him; his ship that he was asked to bring safely into a port where she would be completely lost to him and refitted to make war upon his kin. That was in one scale; in the other were the lives of eleven men, his own included.

He turned at length; and, his back being to the light, the captain could not see how pale his face had grown.

"I accept," he said.

Thus was the bargain made, and thereafter Don Diego enjoyed the freedom of the ship that had been his, and the navigation of her was left entirely in his hands. And because those who manned her were new to the seas of the Spanish Main, and had not yet learned to see in every Spaniard a treacherous, cruel dog to be slain at sight, they used him with the civility which his own suave urbanity invited.

He took his meals in the great cabin with Blood and the half-dozen officers elected to support him. Of these were Hagthorpe, a slight, fair man of thirty; Wolverstone, a swarthy giant who had lost an eye at Sedgemoor; and Ogle the gunner, a burly man who had seen a deal of fighting in his time and whose ignorance of ships was equaled only by his knowledge of guns and all that appertained to them.

They found Don Diego an agreeable, even an amusing companion, and their friendly feeling toward him was fostered by his fortitude and brave equanimity in this adversity.

That Don Diego was not playing fair it was impossible to suspect. Moreover there was no conceivable reason why he should not. And he had been of the utmost frankness with them.

He had denounced their mistake in sailing before the wind upon leaving Barbados. They should have left the island to leeward, heading into the Caribbean and away from the archipelago.

As it was, they would now be forced to pass through it again so as to make Curaçao, and this passage was not to be accomplished without some measure of risk to themselves. At any point between the islands they might come upon an equal or superior craft; whether she were Spanish or English would be equally bad for them, and being undermanned they were in no case to fight. To lessen this risk as far as possible Don Diego directed at first a southerly and then a westerly course; and so, taking a line midway between the islands of Tobago and Grenada, they won safely through the danger zone and came into the comparative security of the Caribbean Sea.

"If this wind holds," he told them that night at supper after he had announced to them their position, "we should reach Curaçao inside three days."

FOR three days the wind held—indeed it freshened a little on the second—and yet on the evening of the third day the *Cinco Llagas* was plowing through a sea contained on every side by the blue bowl of heaven. Captain Blood uneasily mentioned it to Don Diego.

"It will be for tomorrow morning," he was answered with calm conviction.

"By the saints, it is always 'tomorrow morning' with you Spaniards; and tomorrow never comes, my friend."

"But this tomorrow is coming, rest assured. However early you may be astir you shall see land ahead, Don Pedro."

Captain Blood passed on, content, and went to visit Jerry Pitt, his patient, to whose condition Don Diego owed his chance of life. For twenty-four hours now the young navigator had been rid of fever, and so far indeed was he recovered that he complained of his confinement, of the heat in his cabin.

To indulge him Captain Blood consented that he should take the air on deck; and so as the last of the daylight was fading from the sky Jerry Pitt came forth upon the captain's arm.

Seated on the hatch-coamings, the Somerset lad gratefully filled his lungs with the cool night air, and professed himself revived thereby. Then his eye wandered to the darkling vault of heaven, spangled already with a myriad golden points of light. A while he scanned it idly, vacantly; and then his attention became sharply fixed. He looked round and up at Captain Blood, who stood beside him.

"D'ye know anything of astronomy, Peter?" quoth he.

"Astronomy, is it? Faith now, I couldn't tell the Belt of Orion from the Girdle of Venus."

"Ah! And I suppose the rest of this lubberly crew share your ignorance."

"It would be more amiable of you to suppose that they exceed it."

Jerry pointed ahead to a spot of light in the heavens over the starboard bow.

"That is the North Star," said he.

"Is it now? Glory be, I wonder ye can pick it out from the rest."

"And the North Star ahead almost over your starboard bow means that we're steering a course north-northwest, or indeed north by west, for I doubt if we are standing more than ten degrees westward."

"And why shouldn't we?"

"Ye told me, I think, that we came west of the archipelago between Tobago and Grenada with Curaçao for our destination. If that were our present course we should have the North Star abeam, out yonder."

On the instant Captain Blood shed his laziness. He was about to answer when a shaft of light clove the gloom above their heads, coming from the round-house door which had just been opened. It closed again, and presently there was a step on the companion. Don Diego was approaching.

Captain Blood's fingers pressed Jerry's shoulder with significance. Then he called the Don, and spoke to him in English, as had become his custom when others were present.

"Will ye settle a slight dispute for us, Don Diego?" said he lightly. "We are arguing, Mr. Pitt and I, as to which is the North Star."

"Indeed!"

The Spaniard's tone was easy; there was almost a suggestion that laughter lurked behind it, and the reason for this was explained by his next sentence.

"But you tell me, Mr. Pitt he is your navigator?"

"For lack of a better," laughed the captain, good-humoredly contemptuous. "Now I am ready to wager him a hundred pieces of eight that that is the North Star."

And he flung out an arm toward a point of light in the heavens straight abeam. He afterward told Pitt that had Don Diego confirmed him he would have run him through upon the instant. Far from that, however, the Spaniard freely expressed his scorn.

"You have the assurance that is of the ignorance, Don Pedro; and you lose. The North Star is this one."

And he indicated it.

"You are sure?"

"But, my dear Don Pedro!"

The Spaniard's tone was one of amused protest.

"But could I be mistaken? Besides, there is the compass. Step into the steering-room and see what is our course."

His utter frankness, and the easy manner of one who has nothing to conceal resolved at once the doubt that had leaped so suddenly in the mind of Captain Blood. But Jerry Pitt was satisfied less easily.

"In that case, Don Diego, will you tell me, since Curaçao is our destination, why our course is what it is?"

Again there was no faintest hesitation on Don Diego's part.

"Well may you ask," said he, and sighed. "I had hope it would not be observe'. I have been of a carelessness—oh, of a carelessness of the most culpable. I neglect observations. It is my way. I am too sure of myself. I depend too much upon dead reckoning.

"The result is that I find today when at last I take out the quadrant that we do come by a half-degree too much south, so that Curaçao is now almost due north of us. That is what cause the delay. But we will be there tomorrow."

The explanation, so completely satisfactory and so readily and candidly forthcoming, left no room for further doubt. Considering it afterward, Captain Blood confessed to Pitt that it was absurd to have suspected Don Diego. Pirate though he was, he had proved his quality when he had announced himself ready to die sooner than enter into any undertaking that could hurt his honor.

New to the sea and to the ways of adventurers who sailed it, Captain Blood still entertained illusions. But the next dawn was to shatter them rudely and forever.

COMING on deck before the sun was up, he saw land ahead, as the Spaniard had promised them last night. Some ten miles ahead it lay, a long coast-line filling the horizon east and west, with a massive headland jutting forward straight before them.

Staring at it, he frowned. He had not conceived that Curaçao was of such considerable dimensions. Indeed, this looked less like an island than the main itself.

Beating out against the gentle landward breeze he beheld a great ship on their starboard bow, that he conceived to be some four or five miles off, and—as well as he could judge her at that distance—of a tonnage equal if not superior to their own. Even as he watched her she altered her course, and, going about, came heading toward them close-hauled.

A score of his fellows were astir on the forecastle, looking eagerly ahead, and the sound of their voices and laughter reached him across the length of the stately *Cinco Llagas*.

"There," said a soft voice behind him in liquid Spanish, "is the Promised Land, Don Pedro."

It was something in that voice, a muffled note of exultation, that awoke his suspicion and made whole the half-doubt that he had been entertaining. He turned sharply to face Don Diego, so sharply that the sly smile was not effaced from the Spaniard's countenance before Captain Blood's eyes had flashed upon it.

"You find an odd satisfaction in the sight of it—all things considered."

"Of course."

The Spaniard rubbed his hands, and Captain Blood observed that they were unsteady.

"The satisfaction of a mariner."

"Or of a traitor—which?" snapped the Irishman.

And as the Spaniard fell back before him with suddenly altered countenance that confirmed his every suspicion he flung an arm out in the direction of the distant shore.

"What land is that?" he blazed at him. "Will you have the effrontery to tell me that is the coast of Curaçao?" He advanced upon Don Diego furiously, and Don Diego, step by step, fell back.

"Shall I tell you what land it is? Shall I tell you?"

His fierce assumption of knowledge seemed to dazzle and daze the Spaniard. For still he made no answer. And then Captain Blood drew a bow at a venture—or not quite at a venture. Such a coast-line as that, if not of the main itself—and the main he knew it could not be—must belong to either Cuba or Hispaniola. Now, knowing Cuba to lie farther north and west of the two, it followed, he reasoned swiftly, that if Don Diego meant betrayal he would steer for the nearer of these Spanish territories.

"That land, you treacherous, forsworn Spanish dog, is the island of Hispaniola."

Having said it, he closely watched that swarthy face, now overspread with pallor, to see the truth or falsehood of his guess reflected there. But now the retreating Spaniard had come to the middle of the quarter-deck, where the mizzen-sail made a screen to shut them off from the eyes of the Englishmen below. His lips writhed in a snarling smile.

"Ah, *perro inglez!* You know too much," he said under his breath, and sprang for the captain's throat.

Tight-locked in each other's arms, they swayed a moment, then together went down upon the deck, the Spaniard's feet jerked from under him by the Irishman's crooked right leg. Don Diego had confidently thought to choke the life out of Captain Blood, and so gain the half-hour that might be necessary to bring up that fine ship that was beating toward them—a Spanish ship perforce, he assumed, since none other would be so boldly cruising in these Spanish waters off Hispaniola. But all that he had accomplished was completest self-betrayal, as he realized when he found himself upon his back with his opponent kneeling on his chest, whilst the men, summoned by their leader's shout, came clattering up the companionway to his assistance.

"Will I say a prayer for your dirty soul now whilst I am in this attitude of prayer?"

Captain Blood was furiously mocking him.

But the Spaniard, though defeated now beyond hope for himself, forced his lips to smile and gave back mockery for mockery.

"Who will pray for your soul, I wonder, when that frigate comes to lie board and board with you?"

"That frigate!" echoed Captain Blood, suddenly realizing the assumption upon which his prisoner had acted, and perceiving that already it was too late to avoid the consequences of Don Diego's betrayal of them.

There was no trace of humor or urbanity about him now. His light eyes blazed; his face was livid with suppressed fury.

THE ROSE, relinquishing the Spaniard to his men.

"Make him fast," he bade them. "Truss him, wrist and heel, but don't hurt him—not so much as a hair of his precious head."

The injunction was very necessary. Frenzied by the thought that they were likely to exchange the slavery from which they had so lately escaped for a slavery still worse, they would have torn the Spaniard limb from limb upon the spot. And if they now obeyed their captain and refrained, it was only because the sudden steely note in his voice promised for Don Diego Valdez something far more exquisite than death.

"You scum! You dirty pirate! You 'man of honor!'" Captain Blood apostrophized his prisoner.

But Don Diego looked up at him and laughed.

"You underrated me."

He spoke English so that all might hear.

"I tell you that I was not fear death, and I show you that I was not fear it. You no understand. You just an English dog."

"Irish, if you please."

Captain Blood insisted upon that even at such a moment.

"And your parole, you gentleman of Spain?"

"You think I give my parole to leave such filth as you in possession of this my so beautiful ship, to go and make war upon other Spaniards! Ha!"

Don Diego laughed in his throat.

"You fool! You can kill me. Pish! What is it to die? I die with my work well done. In less than an hour you will be the prisoners of Spain, and the *Cinco Llagas* will fly the flag of Spain again."

White-faced, Captain Blood continued to regard him, fury blunting his wits and choking his power of thought.

"Wait," he bade his men at last; and, turning on his heel, he went aside to the rail.

There he was joined by Hagthorpe, Wolverstone and Ogle, the gunner. In silence they stared with him across the water at that other ship. She had veered a point away from the wind, and was running now on a line that must in the end converge with that of the *Cinco Llagas*.

"In less than half an hour," said the captain presently, "we shall have her across our hawse, sweeping our decks with her guns."

"We can fight," said the one-eyed giant, Wolverstone, with an oath.

"Fight!" sneered Blood. "Undermanned as we are, mustering a bare thirty men, in what case are we to fight? It's just suicide, so it is. Our only chance would be to persuade her that we are Spaniards so that she may leave us to go our ways."

"And how is that possible?" quoth Ogle.

"It isn't possible," said Blood. "If it were——"

And then he broke off and stood musing, his eyes upon the green water. Ogle, with a bent for sarcasm, interposed a suggestion bitterly.

"We might send Don Diego Valdez in a boat manned by his Spaniards to assure her that we are all loyal subjects of his Catholic Majesty."

The Captain looked as if he would have struck him. Then another light, the light of inspiration, flashed in his glance.

"Bedad, ye've pointed the way!" said he.

He swung on his heel abruptly and strode back to the knot of men about Don Diego.

"Below, and fetch up the Spanish prisoners," he commanded. "And you, Hagthorpe, set the flag of Spain aloft, where they can see it."

When presently the ten sullen, manacled Spaniards were paraded before him on the quarter-deck Captain Blood briefly and coldly recited to them the treachery of which Don Diego had been guilty and the peril in which they consequently stood.

"This peril," he announced to them, "you share with us. For if we must perish you shall perish with us. But there is one chance—one slender chance—of life for us and for you if you will agree to do as I shall bid you."

Behind him Don Diego laughed aloud, the exaltation of martyrdom on his white face.

"There is no way," he cried in a vibrant voice. "Provide none for him. Let us die rather, and long live Spain!"

Captain Blood did not heed him; his attention was entirely given to those ten prisoners, and on the sullen faces of those hinds he saw the light of no such exaltation as their captain sought to kindle in them. He turned to those who guarded Don Diego.

"Lash him across the mouth of that cannon," he commanded, pointing to the nearest stern-chaser.

THE order quenched some of that Roman spirit that Captain Blood observed and secretly admired in his prisoner. A man may not fear death itself, and yet be appalled by the manner of it.

Don Diego glared maniacally, his eyeballs rolling in his head, and then he fell to struggling in the arms that held him whilst from his lips poured blasphemy and insult whose source was horror. But for all his vain struggles his body was swiftly and relentlessly stretched in an arc across the mouth of the gun, and his legs and arms lashed to the carriage on either side of it. Thence he addressed his tormentor in a tone of frenzy.

"You foul barbarian heretic! You inhuman savage! Will it not content you to kill me in some Christian fashion?"

"Gag him," said Captain Blood.

And in this he had a certain subtle purpose. In a moment, surprize being spent, the Spaniard might recover his intrepidity of spirit, and seek again to instil firmness into his followers.

To these the Irishman now turned, observing with satisfaction the horror stamped on every face of the ten. He commanded the gunner, who was a personable fellow with an air of authority, to stand forward from the rest, and then very deliberately he explained himself in the excellent Castilian of which he was master.

"That ship," he said, "will presently be opening fire upon us unless meanwhile we can take measures to avert it. Now, we are in no case to fight, as your captain well knew when he abused his parole to steer us into this trap.

"But if we are not in case to fight, neither are we in case to surrender, which would mean our death or worse. If die we must, we will die fighting. And if we are driven to fight, it is this gun that will open fire on our side."

And his hand touched the stern-chaser that bore Don Diego stretched across its jaws.

"I trust that you understand me."

Esteban, the gunner, stared white-faced into those pitiless light eyes.

"If I understand?" he cried. "But, *nombre de Dios!* How should I understand? You speak of averting a fight. But how?"

"A fight might be averted; escape might be possible," he was answered, "if Don Diego were to go aboard that frigate and by his presence properly accredited satisfy her that the *Cinco Llagas* is indeed a ship of Spain as her flag announces."

He pointed aloft to the gold-and-crimson banner of Castile that floated from her masthead.

"But since Don Diego is otherwise engaged he can not go in person. He must be represented. You might go as his lieutenant in a boat manned by these countrymen of yours to complete the illusion.

"Should you return without accident, having so played your part that we shall be free to continue on our voyage, Don Diego shall have his life, as shall every one of you. But if there is the least hitch through treachery or misadventure the battle will be opened on our side by this gun, which will be trained upon your boat."

He paused, then asked—

"What have you to say to that?"

A silence followed, broken at last by the Spaniards behind the gunner.

"But accept!" they exhorted him, several speaking at once. "Accept, and do it, name of ——!"

Captain Blood smiled.

"You hear," he said, and added, "Believe me, it is good advice."

Esteban moistened his dry lips, and with the back of his hand mopped the beads of sweat from his brow. His eyes were upon the figure of his captain, and he saw the man's muscles heaving as he attempted to writhe in his bonds.

"But . . . but, how is it to be done? What am I to say to the captain of that ship?"

"You shall be dressed to suit your rank of lieutenant to Don Diego, and you shall bear a letter, which I shall furnish you, which Don Diego is most anxious should be conveyed at once to Cadiz. He has sent you with it in the hope that she may be homeward bound for Spain."

And now those behind Esteban, who saw in this their only chance of life, hoarsely cried out to him to do as was required. To this clamor and to his own terrors the gunner yielded.

Captain Blood's manner became brisk. Time enough had been lost already, and the two ships running ever along their converging lines stood now scarcely more than a mile apart. He ordered the bilboes to be struck off the prisoners, and the long-boat to be got ready for launching.

Esteban meanwhile he carried off to the round-house with him, and what time the gunner donned the garments supplied him Captain Blood was very busy with pens and papers amid the effects of Don Diego. His task was accomplished by the time that Esteban was ready, and he presented to the gunner a package bearing as a superscription a name and address in Cadiz which the captain had found among Don Diego's letters. This package was sealed with the arms of Valdez, and none could have suspected from its eminently correct exterior that it contained nothing but some sheets of blank paper.

WHEN they came forth again upon the quarter-deck the other vessel was within half a mile of them. Blood issued an order, and a blank shot was fired from the prow; instantly the helm was put over, and the *Cinco Llagas* was lying to, her sails flapping idly in the breeze, whilst the Spanish seamen went about launching the boat.

Meanwhile the other vessel, veering a point or two, crept on until she had halved the distance separating them. Not until then did she also heave to in answer to the signal to stand awaiting the boat that was speeding toward her across the sunlit waters. To have held her course so long, and even now to refrain from showing her flag, argued suspicion on her part, and for a moment Captain Blood had almost feared that it was her intention to come on until she lay board and board with them. He drew a breath of relief, when at last he saw her pause.

He was standing with Wolverstone, Hagthorpe and Ogle by the stern-chaser that bore the still writhing Don Diego. Ogle kept the gun trained on the long-boat, whilst his mate swung a spluttering fuse, ready to apply it to the touch-hole at the word of command.

Anxious and watchful were the eyes that followed the boat across the intervening waters until it brought up against the black hull of the frigate, and they could make out Esteban going briskly up the ladder.

After that followed some five minutes of intensest, almost agonizing suspense for all, and then across the water floated the note of a trumpet, to be drowned the next moment in the roar of eight guns that belched fire and metal. The broadside was aimed high, with intent no doubt to sweep the decks of the *Cinco Llagas* since she was standing almost bow on to the enemy.

Fortunately the aim was a thought too high, and the shot hummed and tore through Captain Blood's shrouds, doing little real damage beyond slight wounds to two men who were struck by flying splinters. But if the broadside did not deal the death it was intended to deal, it dealt a consternation almost as fatal.

"We are betrayed! The Spanish dog has betrayed us!" was the cry that went up.

With an oath muttered through clenched teeth Ogle swung to his mate.

"Fire!" he cried, and obediently the man stooped to touch off the gun.

Don Diego writhed again, and then stiffened in his bonds, turning his eyes to sea as the man moved to obey the gunner.

But before the match could touch the powder Blood had torn it from the fellow's hand and set his foot upon it, spinning round as he did so, a wild excitement on his swarthy face.

"Strike that flag!" he roared. "We are not betrayed. It is because the Spaniards have been loyal that this has happened."

And he flung out an arm to point to the other ship's mainmast, to the head of which the English ensign was swiftly soaring, to disclose at last her true identity now that the moment to deliver battle was arrived.

The fact was quickly grasped by every man aboard. Eager hands tore at the halyard, and before the *Pride of Bristol*—as the other vessel was named—could begin to go about the flag of Spain was down and the English flag afloat on the breeze above the *Cinco Llagas*.

That, and the extraordinary tale which by now Esteban was relating—confirmed in part by the blank contents of the package he carried—was enough to give the *Pride of Bristol* pause. The Spaniards were ordered aboard and temporarily detained, whilst an English crew in charge of the mate took possession of the long-boat and put off to visit the *Cinco Llagas*.

Captain Blood received the mate of the *Pride of Bristol* with a tale in which there were perforce certain reservations. It proved not only fully satisfying, but it excited the hilarity of the mate to such a degree that Blood was sorely tempted to kick him overboard.

When at last he recovered from his tempestuous hilarity he announced that Captain Blood should have back his Spanish prisoners, but advised that Don Diego Valdez be hanged out of hand for a treacherous pirate.

"Sure now, I disagree with you entirely," he was answered. "He may be a pirate and a Spaniard and a traitor, but he's a man of Roman spirit. And I've passed my word that if his men kept faith with me he should have his life."

HE TURNED to those about him and pointed to the gun, where Don Diego still hung in his bonds.

"Release him," he commanded. "I keep faith, Don Diego. Your life is spared you. Do you hear?"

Something flickered in his face as he asked the question. He stepped close up to the Spaniard, and then he caught his breath. Don Diego Valdez was dead.

He stood by in silence whilst his men lowered the limp form to the deck. Then the surgeon in him awoke, and he went down on one knee beside the body. No wound or slightest hurt was visible.

It was as he supposed. Don Diego had been slain by the anticipation of death when the other vessel fired her broadside.

Captain Blood rose, and as he turned again, there was an odd wistfulness in his eyes.

"He was a man of a spirit greater than his poor body could contain," he said. "His immortal soul was stouter than his poor mortal heart. Be that his epitaph!"

HOMEWARD BOUND

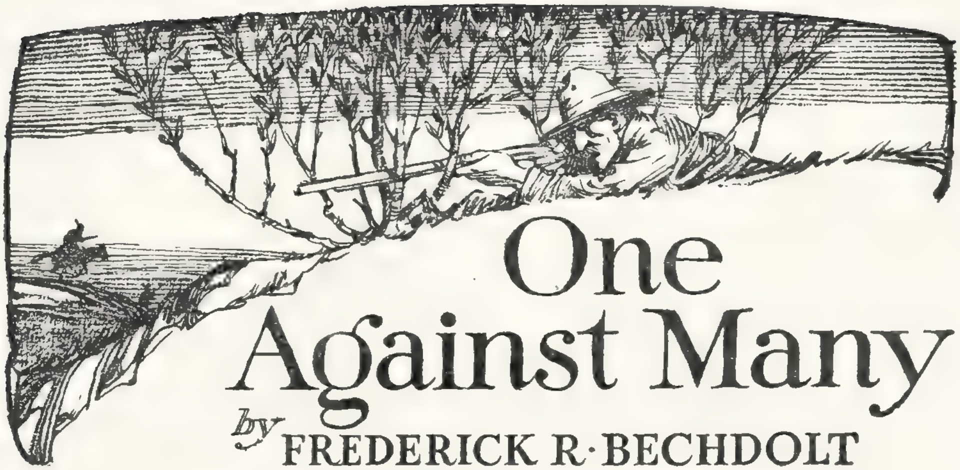
by William Daniel

THE lights that gleam along the coast know well our passing lights;
The stars that glitter overhead, through countless sultry nights
Have watched us trail the same white wake across the same dark sea.
Sky, land and ocean lie the same, but newborn men are we.

We've touched at every sun-scorched port along this blazing shore—
Ceara, Para, Maranho', and others half a score.
We've left four shipmates sleeping 'neath the fever-misted ground,
But their loss can't damp our spirits for tonight we're homeward bound!

The hiss of foam beneath the bows, the engine's throbbing swing,
Have wearied us for months and yet tonight they seem to sing
In harmony a wondrous song, "The time of trial is past—
Bahia's lights drop back astern—we're homeward bound at last!"

The lookout on the foc'sle head, the Black-Gang down below,
Are singing as the lights glide past and ever north we go.
"Four points to port!" The big wheel spins, the heavy bows veer round
And straighten out for open sea. Thank God! We're homeward bound!



One Against Many

by FREDERICK R. BECHDOLT

Author of "John Slaughter's Way," etc.

NOTE:—As you know, we seldom break our habit of printing fiction stories only. You prefer fiction on the whole, and in our magazine's field it is particularly difficult to ensure an article's being absolutely true to fact. Occasionally we have ventured an exception, without at all abandoning the rule. We do so in the case of this series of articles on prominent figures in the development of the West, believing that the author's standing is sufficient guarantee of trueness to essential fact and that your long displayed interest in our country's early history is sufficient warrant.—A. S. H.

MAYBE you will get an insight into certain traits of the old-timers and so will find it easier to believe the facts set forth in this chronicle, if I begin with the tale of "Big Foot" Wallace.

Away back in the days of the Mexican War this Big Foot Wallace, lusty then and in his prime, was taking part in some bushwhacking expedition into northern Chihuahua; and his little company was captured by the soldiers of the southern republic. No one was losing any sleep in those parts over the laws of nations, and the officer commanding the victorious enemy was in a hurry to be moving on. Wherefore, like many another handful of Americans, these prisoners soon found themselves surrounding a jar within whose hidden depths were white and black beans, in number corresponding to their own.

The idea was that each man must draw his bean, and he who got a white one lived, while he who picked a black kernel was lined up with his luckless friends before the nearest wall and shot within the hour. Thus the Mexican commander intended to reduce by one-half the number of his prisoners, and at the same time afford his troops a little entertainment in witnessing the drama of the bean-picking.

There was, in Big Foot Wallace's company, a young fellow with a wife and children waiting for him back in Texas, and as the tattered group crowded around the jar to thrust their hands within and draw forth their different fates this soldier broke down. The thought of the woman and those babies was too much for him.

Big Foot Wallace had just plunged in his hand when the man began to sob. He glanced down at the white bean which his fingers clutched and turned to the stricken youth.

"Here," he whispered with an oath thrown in to show his indifference to the heroics, "take this; I'm feeling lucky today."

With which he turned over his precious bean and—proceeded to draw another white one.

Like the rest of this chronicle the incident is true. It has been used as the basis for at least one bit of fine fiction, but in its original form, as it came from the lips of Big Foot

Wallace, it illuminates for us of a later generation the characters of those extraordinary men who won the great Southwest away from the Apaches. They were, whenever occasion came, perfectly willing to take a long chance against ugly death. That willingness made every one of the old-timers a host in himself.

During the decades between the end of the Mexican War and the coming of the railroads these men drifted westward from the Rio Grande and the Pecos. A lean and sunburned crew, they came by saddle-horse and wagon, by thorough-brace Concord stage-coach and by bull-team, dribbling into the long, thin valleys which reach northward from the Mexican border to the Gila River.

They found such spots as suited them; there they built their cabins, gouged their prospect-holes from the rocky hillsides and dug the irrigation ditches for their ranches. There were few settlements and these remote from one another; the military posts were so insufficiently garrisoned that the troopers had all they could do to look out for themselves; and the Apaches roamed unhindered whither their lust for plunder led them.

These savages had owned the valleys and the ragged mountain ranges between them. They saw the white men drifting in, in twos and threes; they saw the lonely camps and cabins, tenanted by little groups of settlers, beyond all reach of help; they saw the wagon-trains and stages traveling without convoys. Their chiefs were wily, their warriors past masters of the art of ambush. They started in to kill off the newcomers; and they undoubtedly would have succeeded in depopulating most of New Mexico and Arizona if it had not been for that one trait of which Big Foot Wallace furnishes an example.

Therein lies the keynote to the incidents within this little chronicle; the contemptuous disregard for danger, the willingness to take the supreme risk, which made those old-timers perform exploits that were seemingly impossible; which made them outface their naked enemies—who were always looking out for their own swarthy skins—and come forth unscathed from situations wherein death seemed the only possible means by which they could emerge; which made them win out in many a grim fight where the odds were one man against many.

ONE man against many. That was the case with Uncle Billy Rhodes. Back in the early sixties he and his partner had taken up some land down in the Santa Cruz Valley near the pueblo of Tubac. If you drive southward in your car today from Tucson you will pass the spot where Tubac stood until the Apaches laid waste the town during Civil War times and go within a stone's throw of the place where Uncle Billy Rhodes ran one of the biggest and finest bluffs in all the history of Indian-fighting.

It was the custom of the Apaches to raid southward from their reservations into Mexico, scooping up such loot and lives as they could during their journeys. Usually at this particular time they traveled by way of the Santa Catalina Mountains, keeping well to the heights until they reached Pantano, Wash., where they frequently swooped down on the Butterfield stage-station before climbing to the summits of the Whetstones and the Huachucas. Clinging to the rocky ridges, they went on southward and watched the lowlands for signs of victims.

Such a war-party descended into the Santa Cruz Valley one afternoon and found Billy Rhodes' partner alone at the ranch. When they got done with him there was little left in the semblance of a man, but they took good care to postpone burning the ranch-buildings, contenting themselves with promiscuous looting.

The idea was that smoke creates a warning signal and Uncle Billy Rhodes would never come within rifle-shot of the spot once he got sight of the ascending cloud. He was their meat; they possessed their souls in patience and settled down to await his home-coming.

Afternoon was waning and the first long shadows of early evening were beginning to steal across the plain from the base of the mountains when Uncle Billy rode his jaded pony down the faint wagon-track toward the ranch-house. He was weary from the saddle, for he had come a long distance that day—so long a distance that the horse was unfit for much more travel.

He passed his first rude fence and was within two hundred yards or so of the cabin when something made him pull up. He did not know what that something was; but the bronco added to his suspicions by its behavior. And then, while he was reconnoitering, an overeager brave took a pot-shot at him.

The bullet missed, as most Apache bullets had a habit of doing. Next to the courage of the old-timers the utter inability of the North American Indian to grasp the necessity of pulling down his front sight was perhaps the largest factor that helped the white man to win the country west of the Mississippi River. Uncle Billy Rhodes whirled his pony and started back in the direction he had come from.

But the ponies of the Apaches were fresh from the rest they had enjoyed while their masters were prolonging the death agonies of Uncle Billy's partner. It took but a short time for the Indians to catch them up and within a minute or two something like fifty warriors, turbaned, naked from the waist up, were crowding their frenzied mounts in the wake of the fugitive.

The chase, as might have been expected, was a short one. Before he had gone a half-mile Uncle Billy saw that he was going to be overtaken. Already the savages were spreading out, and he could hear the yells of those who were drawing up on either side.

It was the proper time for a man to despair; but Uncle Billy was too busy looking about him for a point of vantage to indulge in any such emotion as that. He had an old-fashioned cap-and-ball revolver, all of whose chambers were loaded; and it was his intention to make those six bullets, if possible, account for six Apaches before he resigned himself to unkind fate.

The river-bed was close at hand; in places the road skirted the willow thickets which lined the stream. Before the fugitive a particularly thick clump of the green shrubs showed; all about it the ground was open. Uncle Billy hardly bothered to check his pony's lame gallop before casting himself bodily into the midst of this shelter. And thereafter the affair took on a different complexion.

The Apache was never foolhardy. Possessed of marvelous patience, he was willing to wait when waiting was the more prudent course of action. And in the beginning the pursuers, who had encircled the willow thicket, contented themselves with shooting from a distance where they could keep to cover.

But evening was growing on, and these savages were imbued with more superstitious fears of the dark than the members of most Indian tribes. It became evident that they must rush matters if they would go to camp before the night enwrapped them.

So the forty-odd came wriggling down the surrounding slopes toward the willow thicket, keeping as close to the earth as possible, striving to close in before they made their open charge. Uncle Billy waited until he got a good shot, and "turned loose" for the first time. A spattering of bullets answered his, but he had the satisfaction of seeing one naked form lying motionless on the hillside.

There came a yell, and now the Apaches showed themselves as they ran forward. The old revolver spoke again and then the third time. The charge broke in its inception; and the retreating enemy left three of their number behind them when they went back to cover.

There followed an interval of silence. It was succeeded by another rush. Uncle Billy fired twice from the depths of his thicket, and both shots scored. The Apaches sought the rocks once more; but the old-timer lay among the willows with a broken elbow from one of their bullets. There was no time, nor were there means for dressing the wound. He gritted his teeth and dug the elbow into the soft sand to stanch the flow of blood, and waited for the next onset.

It came within a few minutes, and Uncle Billy fired his last shot. The good luck which sometimes helps out a brave man in time of trouble saw to it that the ball from his revolver found the chief of the party. When they saw him fall the Indians retired in bad order.

And now, where force had failed them, the Apaches resorted to diplomacy. All they wanted was to get their hands on the white man, and a little lying might be the means to help them to it. In Spanish one of them called from his cover, bidding Uncle Billy give himself up as a prisoner. He had, the herald said, been so brave that they would observe the amenities of the white man's warfare; they would not harm a hair of his head. But if he refused they surely would come on this time and kill him.

To which Uncle Billy Rhodes replied profanely, inviting them to make the charge.

"Because," he ended, "I'm plumb anxious to get some more of you."

And then he sat back biding their coming

—with his empty revolver. But the silence continued uninterrupted; the shadows merged to dusk; twilight deepened to darkness. The Apaches had stolen away, and Uncle Billy Rhodes crept forth from the willows to catch up his horse and ride with his broken arm to Tucson, where he told the story.

Now there is no doubt as to what would have happened to Uncle Billy had he been gullible enough to believe that statement of the Apaches as to his personal safety in case of surrender. As a matter of cold fact neither Indian nor white man had any particular reason to look for favor or expect the truth from his enemy during this long struggle.

Just to get an idea of the relentlessness of their warfare it is worth while noting this incident in passing—one of those incidents which were never reported to Washington for the simple reason that Washington could never understand them.

A BAND of renegade Apaches had left the reservation to go a-plundering down in Mexico. A certain troop of cavalry was riding after them with the usual instructions from Washington to bring them back without bloodshed.

The captain of the troop was a seasoned Indian-fighter, and he managed to keep the fugitives moving so fast that they got next to nothing to eat. When you are traveling without rations along the ridges during an Arizona Summer and there is no time to stop for hunting, no time to bake mescal roots; when you need every pony for riding and you have eaten the last lean dog; then bellies draw in and the ribs begin to stand out.

There were a bunch of squaws and children in the Apache outfit, and by the time the chase had been going on for two weeks or so with back-trackings, twistings and turnings and every march a forced one; why then the pace of the fugitives began to slacken. And the troopers overtook them one fine day right out in the open where there was no opportunity for stand or ambush.

According to his instructions from the men who ran our Indian affairs in Washington, the captain of the troopers must bring these renegades back unharmed or face the necessity of making a great many explanations. So he drew up his men in formation and rode forward to parley with the half-starved savages. He rode right up to them, and their chief came forth to have a talk with him.

This captain was a fine figure of a man, and those who watched him say that he made a noble picture on his big troop-horse before the frowzy band whose gaunt members squatted in the bear-grass, their beady eyes glinting on him under their dirty turbans. And he was a good, persuasive talker. He promised them safe conduct to the reservation and assured them that their truancy would be overlooked, were they to come back now.

He went on to tell of the rations which would be issued to them. He dwelt on that; he mentioned the leanness of their bodies and described at length the stores of food that were waiting for them in the reservation warehouse.

And the words of the captain were beginning to have an effect. There was a stirring among the warriors and a muttering; men glanced at their squaws and the squaws looked at their children. The captain went on as if unconscious that his eloquence was bearing fruit.

All the time as he spoke a girl just grown to womanhood kept edging toward him. In the days when food was plenty she must have owned a savage sort of beauty; but her limbs were lank now and her cheeks were wasted. Her eyes were overlarge from fasting as they hung on the face of the big captain.

So she stood at last in the very forefront of her people, quite unconscious that other eyes were watching her. And behind her her people stirred more and more uneasily; they were very hungry.

Under the hot, clear sky the troopers sat in their saddles, silent, waiting. The lieutenant who had been left in charge watched the little drama. He saw how the moment of the crisis was approaching; how just one little movement in the right direction, one word perhaps, would turn the issue. He saw the half-starved girl leaning forward, her lips parted as she listened to the big captain. He saw an old squaw, wrinkled and toothless, venom in her eyes, crouching beside the hungered girl.

Suddenly the girl took an eager step forward. As if it were a signal a full half of the band started in the same direction.

And just then, with the turning of the

scales; just as the captain's eloquence was winning, the old squaw sprang to her feet. She whirled an ax over her head and brought it down upon the girl. And before the body had fallen to the earth a warrior leveled his rifle and shot the captain through the heart.

The lieutenant started to turn toward his troopers. But he never had a chance to give his order. The whole blue-clad band was charging on a dead run. What followed did not take long. There was not a single prisoner brought back to the reservation.

When men are warring in that relentless spirit, no one who is blessed with the ordinary amount of reasoning-power looks for mercy even if it be promised. And Uncle Billy Rhodes did well to run his bluff down there in the willows by the river.

Sometimes, however, the Apaches felt themselves forced to show respect for their dead enemies There was, for instance, the short-card man from Prescott. Felix was his name; the surname may be chronicled somewhere for all the writer knows; it ought to be. A short-card gambler, and that was not all; men say that he had sold whisky to the Indians, that he was in partnership with a band of stock-rustlers, and that on occasion he had been known to turn his hand to robbery by violence. In fact there is no good word spoken of his life up to the time when the very end came.

In Prescott he owned none of that friendship which a man craves from his fellows; respect was never bestowed upon him. He walked the streets of that frontier town, a moral pariah.

Those who associated with him—those who made their livings by dubious means—looked up to him with an esteem born only of hard-eyed envy for his prosperity. For he was doing well, as the saying goes—making good money.

Felix had managed to find a wife, a half-breed Mexican woman; and she had borne him children, two or three of them. He had a ranch some distance from the town, and many cattle.

And on the great day of his life, the day when he became glorious, he was driving from the ranch to Prescott with his family. A two-horse buckboard and Felix at the reins; the woman and the children bestowed beside him and about him.

Somewhere along the road the Apaches "jumped" them, to use the idiom of those times. A mounted band and on their way across-country, they spied the buckboard and started after it. The road was rough; the half-broken ponies were weary; and the renegades gained at every jump. Felix plied the whip and kept his broncos to the dead run until their legs were growing heavy under them and the run slackened to a lumbering gallop.

Prescott was only a few miles away. They reached a place where the road ran between rocky banks, a place where there was no going save by the wagon-track.

Felix slipped his arm around his wife and kissed her. It was perhaps the first time he had done it in years; one can easily believe that. He kissed the children.

"Whip 'em up," he bade the woman. "I'll hold the road for you."

And he jumped off the buckboard with his rifle and sixteen rounds of ammunition.

In Prescott the woman told the story and a relief party rode out within the half-hour. They found the body of the short-card man and stock-thief with the bodies of fourteen Apaches sprinkled about among the rocks. And the surviving Apaches, instead of mutilating the remains of their dead enemy as was their custom on such occasions, had placed a bandanna handkerchief over his face, weighting down its corners with pebbles lest the wind blow it away.

IT WAS near Prescott—only four miles below the village—that a woman fought Apaches all through a long September afternoon. The Hon. Lewis A. Stevens was in town attending a session of the Territorial Legislature and his wife was in charge of the ranch near the Point of Rocks that day in 1867. A hired man was working about the place.

One hundred yards away from the house an enormous pile of boulders rose toward the nearer hills. Beneath some of the overhanging rocks were great caves, and the depressions between the ridges gave hiding-places to shelter scores of men.

Shortly after noon Mrs. Stevens happened to look from the window of the kitchen where she was at work. Something was moving behind a clump of spiked niggerheads between the back door and the corrals; at first glance it looked like a dirty rag stirring in the wind, but when the woman had held her eyes on it a moment she saw, among the bits of rock and the thorny twigs with which it had been camouflaged, the folds of an Apache warrior's headgear.

Now as she stepped back swiftly from the window toward the double-barreled shotgun which was a part of her kitchen furnishings and always hung conveniently among the pots and pans, she caught sight of more turbans there in her back yard. With the consummate patience of their kind some twenty-odd Apaches had been spending the last hour or so wriggling along the baked earth, keeping to such small cover as they could find as they progressed inch by inch from the boulder hill toward the ranch-house.

The majority of the savages were still near the pile of rocks when Mrs. Stevens threw open her kitchen door and gave the warrior behind the niggerheads one load of buckshot; and the more venturesome among them who had been following their luckless companion's lead broke back to that shelter at the moment she fired. Fortunately the hired man was out in front, and the roar of the shotgun brought him into the house on a run. By this time more than twenty Apaches were firing from the hill; the tinkling of broken glass from the windows and the buzzing of bullets were filling the intervals between the banging of their rifles.

Like most Arizona ranch-houses in those days, the place was a pretty well-equipped arsenal. By relaying each other at loading, Mrs. Stevens and the hired man managed to hold opposite sides of the building. Thus they repelled two rushes; and they drove the enemy back to their hillside a third time when they made an attempt to reach the corrals and run off the stock.

The battle lasted all the afternoon until a neighbor by the name of Johnson who had heard the firing came with reinforcements from his ranch. That evening after the savages had been driven off for good Mrs. Stevens sent a message into Prescott to her husband.

"Send me more buckshot. I'm nearly out of it," was what she wrote.

DURING the late sixties and the seventies the stage-lines had a hard time of it, what with Apaches running off stock and ambushing the coaches along the road. There were certain stations, like those at the Pantano Wash and the crossing of the San Pedro, whose adobe buildings were all pitted with bullet-marks from successive sieges; and at these lonely outposts the arrival of the east or west bound mail was always more or less of a gamble.

Frequently the old thorough-brace Concord would come rattling in with driver or messenger missing; and on such occasions it was always necessary to supply the dead man's place for the ensuing run. Yet willing men were rarely lacking, and an old agent tells how he merely needed to wave a fifty-dollar bill in the faces of the group who gathered round at such a time to secure a new one to handle the reins.

In those days an Indian fight wasn't such a great matter if one bases his opinion on the way the papers handled them in their news columns. Judge by this paragraph from the *Arizonian*, August 27, 1870:

> On Thursday, August 18, the mail buggy from the Rio Grande had come fifteen miles toward Tucson from the San Pedro crossing when the driver, the messenger and the escort of two soldiers were killed by Apaches. The mail and stage were burned. Also there is one passenger missing who was known to have left Apache Pass with this stage.

You are of course at liberty to supply the details of that affair to suit yourself; but it is safe to say there was something in the way of a battle before the last of these luckless travelers came to his end. For even the passengers went well armed in those days and were entirely willing to make a hard fight of it before they knuckled under; as witness the encounter at Stein's Pass, where old Cochise and Mangus Colorado got the stage cornered on a bare hilltop with six passengers aboard one afternoon. The writer has given that story in detail elsewhere, but it is worth noting here that it took Cochise and Mangus Colorado and their five hundred warriors three long days to kill off the Free Thompson party—whose members managed to take more than one hundred and fifty Apaches along with them when they left this life.

But drivers were canny during those times; and even the Apache with all his skill at ambush could not always entrap them. In the *Tucson Citizen* of April 20, 1872, under the heading LOCAL MATTERS, we find this brief paragraph:

> The eastern mail, which should have arrived here last Monday afternoon, did not get in until Tuesday. The Apaches attacked it at Dragoon Pass and the driver went back fifteen miles to Sulphur Springs; and on the second trial ran the gantlet in safety.

Which reads as if there might have been considerable action and much maneuvering on that April day in 1872 where the tracks of the Southern Pacific climb the long grade up from Wilcox to Dragoon Pass.

THERE was a driver by the name of Tingley on the Prescott line who had the run between Wickenburg and La Paz back in 1869. He had seen quite a bit of Indian-fighting and was sufficiently seasoned to keep his head while the lead was flying around him. One February day he was on the box with two inside passengers, Joseph Todd of Prescott and George Jackson of Petaluma, California.

Everything was going nicely, and the old Concord came down the grade into Granite Wash with the horses on the jump and Tingley holding his foot on the brake. They reached the bottom of the hill, and the driver lined them out where the road struck the level going.

And then, when the ponies were surging into their collars, with the loose sand and gravel half-way to the hubs, somewhere between thirty and forty Apaches opened fire from the brush on both sides of the wagon-track.

That first volley came at close range; so close that in spite of the customary poor marksmanship of their kind the Indians wounded every man in the coach. A bullet got Tingley through the wrist. He dropped the reins, and before he could regain them the team was running away.

Those six ponies turned off from the road at the first jump and plunged right into the midst of the Indians. On the outside Tingley could see the half-naked savages leaping for the bridles and clawing at the stage door as they strove to get hand-holds; but the speed was too great for them; the old Concord went reeling and bumping through the entire party, leaving several warriors writhing in the sand where the hoofs of the fright-maddened broncos had spurned them.

By this time Tingley had drawn his revolver, and the two passengers joined him in returning the fire of the enemy. Now he bent down and picked up the reins, and within the next two hundred yards or so he managed to swing the leaders back into the road.

From there on it was a race. The Apaches were catching up their ponies and surging along at a dead run to overtake their victims. But Tingley, to use the expression of the Old-Timers, poured the leather into his team, and kept the long lead which he had got.

The stage pulled up at Cullen's Station with its load of wounded; and word was sent to Wickenburg for a doctor, who arrived in time to save the lives of the two inside passengers, although both men were shot through the body.

Stage-driver and shotgun messenger usually saw plenty of perilous adventures during the days of Mangus Colorado, Cochise, Victorio, Nachez and Geronimo; but if one was hungry for Indian-fighting in those times he wanted to be a mule-skinner. The teamsters became so inured to battling against Apaches that the wagon-train cook who, when the savages attacked the camp near Wickenburg one morning before breakfast, kept on turning flapjacks during the entire fight and called his companions to the meal at its conclusion, is but an example of the ordinary run of wagon-hands. That incident, by the way, is vouched for in the official history of Arizona.

"BRONCO" MITCHEL'S experiences afford another good illustration of the hazards of freighting. In the latter seventies and the early eighties, when Victorio, Nachez and Geronimo were making life interesting for settlers, he drove one of those long teams of mules which used to haul supplies from Tucson to the military posts and mining-camps of southeastern Arizona. Apparently he was a stubborn man, else he would have forsaken this vocation early in the game.

At Ash Springs near the New Mexican boundary a wagon-train with which he was working went to camp one hot Summer's day. They had been warned against the place by some one who had seen Apaches lurking in the vicinity; but the animals needed water and feed, and the wagon-master took a chance. Bronco Mitchel, who was young then, and a foreigner who was cooking for the outfit, were placed on sentry duty while the mules were grazing.

The heat of early afternoon got the best of Bronco Mitchel as he sat on the hillside with his back against a live-oak tree; and after several struggles to keep awake, he finally dropped off. How long he had been sleeping he never was able to tell, but a shot awakened him.

He opened his eyes in time to see the whole place swarming with Apaches. The cook lay dead a little distance from him. The rest of his companions were making a desperate fight for their lives; and a half-dozen of the Indians, who had evidently just caught sight of him, were heading for him. There was one thing to do, and no time to lose about it. He ran as he had never run before, and after a night and day of wandering was picked up, all but dead, by a squad of scouting cavalry.

One evening two or three years later Bronco Mitchel was freighting down near the border, and he made his camp at the mouth of Bisbee Cañon. The mules were grazing near by, and he was lying in his blankets under the trail-wagon, with a mongrel puppy, which he carried along with him for company, beside him.

Just as he was dropping off to sleep the puppy growled. Being now somewhat experienced in the ways of the Territory, Bronco Mitchel immediately clasped his hands over the little fellow's muzzle and held him there, mute and struggling.

He had hardly done this when the thud of hoofs came to his ears; and a band of Apaches appeared in the half-light, passing his wagon. There was a company of soldiers in camp within a mile or two, and the savages were in a hurry; wherefore they had contented themselves with stealing the mules and forbore from searching for the teamster, who lay there choking the puppy as they drove the plundered stock within three yards of him.

Now it so happened that Bronco Mitchel's team included a white mare, who was belled; for mules will follow a white mare to perdition if she chooses to wander thither. And, knowing the ways of that mare, Bronco Mitchel was reasonably certain that she would seize the very first opportunity to stray from the camp of her captors—just as she had strayed from his own camp many a time—with all the mules after her.

So when the Indians had gone by far enough to be out of earshot Bronco Mitchel took along his rifle, a bridle and canteen, and dogged their trail. He did not even go to the trouble of seeking out the soldiers but hung to the tracks alone, over two ridges of the Mule Mountains and up a lonely gorge—where, according to his expectations, he met his stock the next day and, mounting the old bell mare, ran them back to Bisbee Cañon.

Other encounters with Victorio's renegades enriched the teamster's store of experience, but his narrowest escape remained to climax the whole list during the days when old Geronimo was off the reservation. One torrid noon he had watered his mules and drawn his lead and trail wagons off the road over in the San Simon country.

At the time it was supposed that no renegades were within a hundred miles, and Bronco Mitchel felt perfectly safe in taking a siesta under one of the big vehicles. Suddenly he awakened from a sound sleep; and when his eyes flew open he found himself gazing into the face of an Apache warrior.

The Indian was naked save for his turban, a breech clout, his boot-moccasins and the usual belt of cartridges. Even for an Apache he was unusually ugly; and now as he saw the eyes of the white man meeting his, he grinned. It was such a grin as an ugly dog gives before biting. At that instant Bronco Mitchel was lying flat on his back.

An instant later, without knowing how he did it, Bronco Mitchel was on all fours with the wagon between him and the renegade. In this posture he ran for some distance before he could gather his feet under him; and to stimulate his speed there came from behind him the cracking of a dozen rifles. He rolled into a shallow arroyo and dived down its course like a hunted rabbit.

Once he took enough time to look back over his shoulder and saw the turbaned savages spreading out in his wake. After that he wasted no energy in rearward glances, but devoted all his strength to the race, which he won unscathed, and kept on teaming thereafter until the railroad spoiled the business.

SUCH incidents as these of Bronco Mitchel's, however, were all in the day's work, and weren't regarded as anything in particular to brag about in those rough times. As a matter of fact the *Weekly Arizonian* of May 15, 1869, gives only about four inches under a one-line head to the battle between Tully & Ochoa's wagon-train and three hundred Apaches, and in order to get the details of the fight one must go to men who heard its particulars narrated by survivors.

Santa Cruz Castañeda was the wagonmaster, an old-timer even in those days, and the veteran of many Indian fights. There were nine wagons in the train, laden with flour, bacon and other provisions for Camp Grant, and fourteen men in charge of them. The Apaches ambushed them near the mouth of a cañon not more than ten miles from the post.

Somehow the wagonmaster got warning of what was impending in time to corral the wagons in a circle with the mules turned inside the enclosure. The teamsters disposed themselves under the vehicles and opened fire on the enemy, who were making one of those loose-order rushes whereby the Apache used to love to open proceedings if he thought he had big enough odds.

Before the accurate shooting of these leather-faced old-timers the assailants gave back. When they had found cover they sent forward a warrior, who advanced a little way waving a white cloth and addressed Santa Cruz in Spanish.

"If you will leave these wagons," the herald said, calling the wagonmaster by name, "we will let all of you go away without harming you."

To which Santa Cruz replied—

"You can have this wagon-train when I can't hold it any longer."

The Apache translated the words and backed away to the rocks from behind which he had emerged. And the fight began again with a volley of bullets and a cloud of arrows. At this time there were about two hundred Indians in the ambushing party, and they were surrounding the corral of wagons.

Occasionally the Apaches would try a charge; but there never was a time on record when these savages could hold a formation under fire for longer than a minute or two at the outside; and the rushes always broke before the bullets of the teamsters. Between these sorties there were long intervals of desultory firing—minutes of silence with intermittent pop-popping to vary the deadly monotony. Once in a while the surrounding hillsides would blossom out with smoke-puffs, and the banging of the rifles would merge into a sort of long roll.

Always the teamsters lay behind the sacks of flour which they had put up for breastworks, lining their sights carefully, firing with slow deliberation. Now and again a man swore or rolled over in limp silence; and the sandy earth under the wagons began to show red patches of congealing blood.

By noon the forces of the enemy had been augmented by other Apaches who had come to enjoy the party until their number now reached more than three hundred. And the afternoon sun came down hot upon the handful of white men. Ammunition began to run low.

The day dragged on and the weary business kept up until the sun was seeking the western horizon, when a squad of seven cavalrymen on their way from Fort Grant to Tucson happened to hear the firing. They came charging into the battle as enthusiastically as if they were seven hundred, and cut right through the ring of the Apaches.

Under one of the wagons the sergeant in charge of the troopers held counsel with Santa Cruz Castañeda. Cartridges were getting scarce; the number of the Apaches was still growing; there was no chance of any other body of soldiers coming along this way for a week or so at the least.

"Only way to do is make a break for it," the sergeant said.

The wagonmaster yielded to a fate which was too great for him and consented to abandon the train. They bided their time until what seemed a propitious moment and then, leaving their dead behind them, the sixteen survivors—which number included the seven soldiers—made a charge at the weakest segment of the circle. Under a cloud of arrows and a volley of bullets they ran the gantlet and came forth with their wounded. Hanging grimly together, they retreated, holding off the pursuing savages, and eventually made their way to Camp Grant.

Now the point on which the little newspaper item dwells is the fact that the Indians burned the entire wagon-train, entailing a loss of twelve thousand dollars to Tully & Ochoa and of twenty thousand dollars to the United States Government. On the heroics it wastes no type. It seems to have been regarded as bad taste in those days to talk about a man's bravery. Either that, or else the bravery was taken for granted.

In that same cañon near Camp Grant two teamsters died, as the berserks of old used to like to die, taking many enemies with them to the great hereafter. James Price, a former soldier, was the name of one, and the name which men wrote on the headboard of the other was Whisky Bill. By that appellation you may sketch your own likeness of these two; and to help you out, you are hereby reminded that the gray dust of those Arizona roads used to settle into the deep lines of the mule-skinner's faces beyond all possibility of removal; the sun and wind used to flay their skins to a deep, dull redness.

Whisky Bill and Jim Price with an escort of two cavalry troopers were driving two wagons belonging to Thomas Venable, loaded with hay for Camp Grant, when fifty Apaches ambushed them in the cañon. Price was killed at the first volley and one of the soldiers was badly wounded in the face.

The three living men took refuge under the wagons and stood off several rushes of the savages. Then the soldier who had been wounded got a second bullet and made up his mind he would be of more use in trying to seek help at Fort Grant than in staying here. He managed to creep off into the brush before the Indians got sight of him.

Now Whisky Bill and the other soldier settled down to make an afternoon's fight of it, and for three hours they held off the savages. Half a dozen naked bodies lay limp among the rocks to bear witness to the old teamster's marksmanship when a ball drilled him through the chest and he sank back dying.

There was only one chance now for the remaining trooper, and he took it. With his seven-shot rifle he dived out from under the wagon and gained the nearest clump of brush. At once the Apaches sallied forth from their cover in full cry after him.

Heedless of their bullets, he halted long enough to face about and slay the foremost of his pursuers; then ran on to a pile of rocks, from which he made another brief stand, only to leave the place as his enemies hesitated before his fire. Thus he fled, stopping to shoot when those behind him were coming too close for comfort; and eventually they gave up the chase.

In Camp Grant, where he arrived at sundown, he found his fellow trooper, badly wounded but expected to live, under care of the post surgeon. And the detachment who went out after the renegades buried the two teamsters beside the road where they had died fighting.

A ONE against many; that was the rule in these grim fights. But the affair which took place on the Cienega de Souz, fifteen miles above the old San Simon stage-station and twenty-five miles from Fort Bowie, tops them all when it comes to long odds. On the twenty-first day of October, 1871, one sick man battled for his life against sixty-odd Apaches and—won out.

R. M. Gilbert was his name; he was ranching and for the sake of mutual aid in case of Indian raids he had built his adobe house at one end of his holding, within two hundred yards of his neighbor's home. The buildings stood on bare ground at the summit of a little rise near the Cienega bottom, where the grass and tules grew waist-high.

Early in the month of October Gilbert was stricken with fever, and Richard Barnes, the neighbor, moved into his house to take care of him. The patient dragged along after a fashion until the early morning of the twenty-first found him, wasted almost to skin and bone, weak, bedridden. And at about six o'clock that morning Barnes left the house to go to his own adobe.

The Apaches, according to their habit when they went forth to murder isolated settlers or prospectors, had chosen the dawn for the hour of attack, and they were lying in the tall grass in the Cienega bottom when Barnes emerged from the building. They let him go almost to the other adobe before they opened fire; and he dropped at the volley, dying from several wounds.

Then Gilbert, who had not stirred from his bed for many days, leaped from his blankets and took down a Henry rifle from the cabin wall. He had been weak; now that thing which men call "sand" gave strength unto him; and he ran from the house to rescue his companion.

The Apaches were rushing from the tules toward the prostrate form. He paused long enough to level his rifle and fire; then came on again. And the savages fell back.

Easier to bide in the shelter of the tulles and kill off this mad white man than to show themselves and run a chance of getting one of his bullets.

They reasoned well enough; but something mightier than logic was behind Gilbert that morning. With the strength which comes to the fever-stricken in moments of supreme excitement, he reached his friend, picked him up, and while the bullets of his enemies kicked up dust all about him bore him on his shoulder back into the cabin. There he laid him down and proceeded to hold the place against the besiegers.

The Apaches deployed until they were surrounding the house. Then they opened fire once more, and as they shot they wriggled forward, coming ever closer until some of them were so near that they were able to place their bullets through the rude loopholes which the settler had made for defense of his home.

All the morning the battle went on. Sometimes the savages varied their tactics by rushes and even thrust the barrels of their rifles through the windows. The room was filled with smoke. During lulls in the firing Gilbert heard the groaning of his companion; he heard the moans change to the long, harsh death-rattle.

Some time during the noon hour as he was standing at a loophole shooting at a bunch of naked, frowzy-haired warriors who had appeared in front of the building, an Apache brave who had stolen up behind the adobe took careful aim through a broken window and got him in the groin. But the sick man bound a handkerchief about the wound and dragged himself from window to window, loading his rifle, firing whenever a turban showed.

About mid-afternoon a venturesome group of warriors rushed the side hill, gained the cabin wall and flung bundles of blazing fagots on the roof. And within ten minutes the inside of the place was seething with smoke-clouds; showers of sparks were dropping on the floor; flaming shreds of brush were falling all about the sick man.

He groped his way to the bed and called Barnes. There was no answer. He bent down and peered through the fumes at the other's face. Death had taken his friend.

Gilbert loaded his rifle and a revolver. With a weapon in either hand he flung open the door, and as he ran forth he saw in the hot afternoon sunshine the shadow of an Indian who was hiding behind a corner of the building. He leaped toward the place and as the warrior was stepping forth shot him in the belly. Then he fled for the tulles in the Cienega bottom.

Under a shower of bullets he gained the shelter of the reeds. And during all the rest of that afternoon he lay there standing off the Apaches. When night came he crawled away. All night and all the next day he traveled on his hands and knees and finally reached the hay camp of David Wood, sixteen miles away.

Wood dressed his wounds and sent word to Camp Bowie, and a troop of cavalry chased the renegades into the Chiracahua Mountains, where they escaped, eventually to make their way back to the reservation in time for next ration day.

* * *

THESE tales are authentic, and are but a few examples of the battles which the old-timers fought during the years while they were winning the Southwest away from the Indians. Some of those old-timers are living to this day.

There is one of them dwelling in Dragoon Pass, where the mountains come down to the lower lands like a huge promontory fronting the sea. Uncle Billy Fourrs is his name; and if you pass his place you can see, on a rocky knoll, the fortress of boulders which he built to hold his lands against the renegades back in the seventies.

Not many years ago some government agents had Uncle Billy up in Tucson on a charge of fencing government land, for according to the records he had not gone through the formality of taking out some of the requisite papers for proper possession. That case is one instance of a man pleading guilty and getting acquittal.

For Uncle Billy Fourrs acknowledged the formal accusation and still maintained the land was his own.

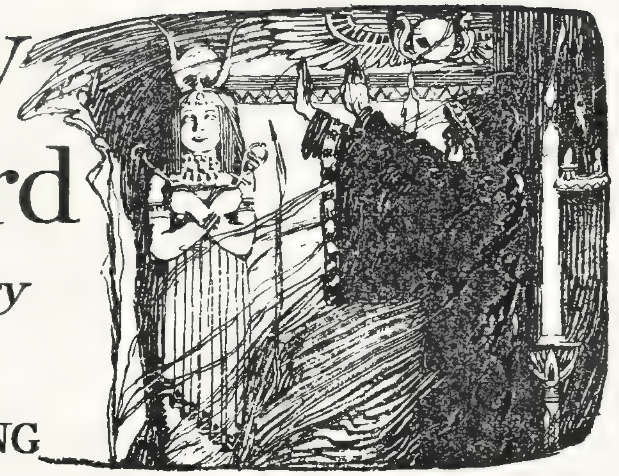
"How," asked the government prosecutor, "did you get it?"

"I took it away from the Indians," was the answer. And the jury, being an Arizona jury, promptly acquitted him. Which was, when you come to think over such incidents as the foregoing, only simple justice.

Sorcery and Everhard

A Four-Part Story
Part I

by
GORDON YOUNG



Author of "Bluffed," "Sir Galahad and the Badger," etc.

Perhaps luck, accidents and things of the kind, are cryptic decrees of the gods, which we do not understand but must obey.—From the note-book of D. E. Richmond.

CHAPTER I

ONE morning I sat up in bed to sip a pot of coffee and see what was going on in the world; and I bent over a two-column headline on the front page that told of Don E. Richmond's death.

Donald Richmond, *alias* Everhard, gambler and gunman, had cashed in. That was the way the opening paragraph put it.

The paper happened to be the San Francisco *Chronicle*. The dispatch that told of his death was from Pittsburg. The *Chronicle* had gone into its files and retold something of many local stories in which the gambler had played a part.

It seemed that in a rather picturesque way this Everhard was a person of distinction. For many years he had been notorious as a gambler and a "killer"—literally a dead shot, and one of the quickest men that ever put finger to trigger.

The article as much as said that though Everhard was in many ways an unpraiseworthy citizen yet it was to be doubted if he had ever killed a man who did not deserve to be hanged.

His death seemed to be of considerable news value. It was said that though he was the friend and associate of crooks and sharpers and himself a "bad-man" he was a unique character, a remarkable character for the underworld. He was never known to touch a drop of alcoholic liquor; he was never heard to use an oath; he did not even use tobacco, and women had no intimate part in his life.

The article spoke of what was called his "iron nerve;" mentioned that he had a "cold personality," dark-gray eyes, steady as rivets; a face inclined toward thinness, with prominent features and expressionless as the palm of a dead man's hand. His movements were habitually slow—except when reaching for a gun, and then there was only a swift, blurred gesture that the eye could scarcely follow. He was rather vain and sensitive to insult, though in a cold, punctilious way he was very polite and inclined to be formal.

A former chief of police who had been in office when Everhard was getting into trouble—and out of it—was quoted as saying:

"Don Richmond, or Everhard as he called himself, was the most fearless, the most audacious gunman I ever knew or heard of. Yes, and the most cautious too. And he played a lone-handed game from start to finish. The fellow that got him had to do it while he was asleep."

I was so interested that I sent out for the other papers, and being a late sleeper, got the early editions of the afternoon papers. They told pretty much the same story and in the same way, though one of them was frankly skeptical about Everhard's reputation; said he was just a dangerous crook who had been credited with a lot of exploits with which he probably had had nothing to do; and that the public, from Robin Hood down, liked to be romantic over outlaws.

That was by some irate editorial writer who in about three inches of space objected to the attention being given the death of that notorious fellow; and declared that it was just such nonsense over "bad-men" that encouraged youths to be criminals. The editorial writer did not use much space, but he was highly indignant; he doubted if Everhard had really been a brave man.

"Being one of the greatest revolver-shots in the world, he was pretty much in the position of a champion pugilist who does not need much bravery to get into a fist-fight with undersized strangers. Great stories are told of how in underworld feuds this Everhard wiped out one gang after another single-handed; but these distinguished exploits are not a matter of record, and the police will not confirm them. But it *is* known that he was actually a crooked gambler and a gunman; or in other words a cheat and a murderer."

I read them all over carefully. I was deeply interested and irritated—a vain man could not be otherwise.

On the whole it was surprizing to find myself so well thought of. Though very "cold" and full of "iron nerve" I had the bashful feeling that it was nearly immodest of me to be alive.

I was almost ridiculously interested. I felt as ghosts must feel when they waft up eagerly out of the ground to read in the midnight moonlight the epitaph newly set at the grave's head.

Though possessing a cold personality and being "emotionless as a dead man's palm," I felt a strange twitch of sympathy, almost of sorrow, for the poor unknown impostor who had been found on the blood-soaked bed of a Pittsburg rooming-house; though I was reasonably confident that he was the burglar who had plundered my apartment at New York about six nights before. He had carried off my packed suitcases and a little box containing many gold ornaments, brooches, buckles and such—from which the more precious jewels had been pried.

Some of my letters and papers were found on him. In that way he had been identified. Perhaps he had actually taken my name. It seemed to me that a man could find no better way of drawing down ill luck upon himself.

For my own part it was a name that seemed to magnetize trouble and draw it to me; and because I did not turn my back and run, or shout for help, or ask the police to do something, I found that my premature obituaries were those of a "bad-man."

It was not by accident, I knew, that he had been put to death; and since the murder was evidently done by persons unknown to me personally the contents of the suitcases, and especially of the leather box filled with gold trinkets, would confirm them in the belief that I was out of the way.

When Hurgronje, as close an associate as the devil ever had upon this earth, learned all of the facts he would probably not be so highly gratified. He might think it true that I was dead; but where—where—where had I concealed the gems of inestimable value which had been torn from their settings?

As a matter of fact I had them in a broad, soft leather belt around my waist.

Hurgronje boasted that he had powers of "magic" and often gave manifestations of "supernatural" control; but he was very timid of powder and lead.

I had gone into his house and come out with enough jewels to ransom a dozen ancient kings, barbaric kings.

I DID not know what to do with those jewels. They were not mine. They belonged to a dead woman—or some of them had belonged to her. I had not stopped to argue and choose which I could take in her name.

She had been a woman of forceful personality and tragic beauty. The beauty, as beauty often is in the faces of women, must have been prophetic; her death was brutal.

I took the jewels. I took them by force, perhaps by something more than force. I took them not only at the point of guns, but at the point of blazing guns; and the lights were put out or Death would have had his hands more full when I backed, still shooting, from that great room, hung with draperies and festooned with strange and grotesque arms, gathered from distant and savage peoples—but none more savage nor so brutal as the men I had found there.

In their black-velvet-lined casket the princely heap of gems had glimmered in the gun-fire as if signaling their presence to me, as if urging me to take them. I did.

The people in that curiously theatrical

room whom I most willingly, eagerly, would have sent out into the mist where ghosts live and move, ducked low in the darkness and sprawled under tables and behind furniture. I was not unnerved, not disconcerted—a little handicapped, however—by the sudden blackness from the extinguished lights, by my unfamiliarity with the room, the commotion, noise, yells, overturning of furniture, together with the roar of guns and clatter of missiles thrown through the darkness. There were shots at me; but as each shot was the flaming signal of where some form stood, even these were not without an advantage.

Eight men had been gathered about the long black table—almost everything in the room was black, including their hearts—to share the woman's queenly wealth. Three of them were hellward-bound when I came from the room; and some of the remaining five had to be patched and sewn carefully to keep their souls from leaking out.

I carried off just about all the jewels that Hurgronje had. He was wealthy and mad over gems. I knew nothing of their value. Precious stones, jewelry, ornaments, have no appeal for me.

I had not gone into the house after jewels; but, being in, I took them because they were at my fingers' tip, and many of them had belonged to a woman who was a very dear friend. These men had murdered her.

I had taken about all of Hurgronje's valuable collection. He was a black magician; let him summons devils and jinnee to bring him the wealth back again.

ON THE whole I have much luck. Some of it is ill luck; but I have no real reason for complaining. Perhaps luck, accidents, and such coincidences as have come to me are the cryptic decrees of the gods which we do not understand but must obey.

In preparing to leave New York and follow Hurgronje to San Francisco, where I was to some extent well known, I had considered the matter of a disguise. But some days' growth of beard and a mirror convinced me that I was edging into foolishness; so, taking another name and some little precautions to keep any one from following, I had contrived to get into San Francisco at night and planted myself in the apartment of a friend.

By keeping within doors in daylight and avoiding the places where I was most likely to be recognized at night, I hoped to do about as I pleased without disturbing Hurgronje until I got the chance to shoot him. The death of the man in Pittsburg did more for my concealment than I could have done.

The friend into whose rooms I had moved was known as Lord Bob. He had another name, but he used it only on rare occasions when something legal was involved. He was not a lord, or in any way connected with nobility. He did not pretend to be, so far as I know.

No one really knew much about him, though he seemed the least mysterious of men. I then hadn't the faintest idea of how he managed to live, unless from time to time he received some kind of income from an inheritance, or unless he was a crook.

He was always in debt and he always had credit. A prince incognito could not have revealed more charming manners; but Lord Bob, though never disagreeable, was charming only in a unique, exceedingly curious way. He was extremely popular in a rather gay and expensive, but quite fashionable, social crowd; and he would rather owe a restaurant a thousand dollars than a hostess one unacknowledged favor.

Lord Bob was a tall, slender, blond young man, who tried to appear always on the verge of boredom, but was, I had felt, rather incapable of showing excitement. One had to know him a long time not to think that he was in some ways rather stupid.

Though there are perhaps other and more important things to be related, I shall pause to give a little attention to Lord Bob. I had arranged by wire to settle down in his rooms. I arrived about 11 P.M. and was shown in by a polite, bullet-headed fellow who looked more like a hod-carrier than a valet.

I should not ridicule Jackman, however; for frequently—when looking for sanctuary—a thin, pale, nervous, superstitious pickpocket by the name of John Gay had attached himself to me. In fact he had played an important part in the Hurgronje incident, then disappeared.

I was shown in by Jackman and found Lord Bob, every blond hair plastered down, his face freshly shaved and pomaded, in a dressing-gown and about three feet deep into a leather chair. At times he affected a monocle, which may have had something to do with his name. An iced gin rickey was on the table beside him, a long, monogramed cigaret between his dainty fingers; and some French magazines were scattered about.

He placed his monocle, took his feet from the hassock; and, glancing at me from shoes to collar, said plaintively—

"Aren't you ever going t' get a new suit?"

He had, or pretended to have, an aversion to my wearing dark cloth. Lord Bob, except occasionally with women, appeared to be serious, in earnest. He did not get out of the chair. He did not advance a hand.

"Where's your luggage?"

I told him a burglar had taken it. He stared at me as if incredulously thinking the matter over, then rather loudly, emphatically, said—

"Jackman—Jackman?"

"Yes, sir."

"There might be an idea for us in that, Jackman. What could we have stolen? You will of course leave the windows open. We need fresh air. But lock the doors. There must be no carelessness on our part. Sit down, Mr.— Mr.— What the —— is your name?"

He began fumbling in his pockets and calling on Jackman to bring him the last telegram. The efficient Jackman picked it from a writing-desk, and Lord Bob glanced at the signature.

"Oh, Mr. Richards. Sit down, Don. That's all, Jackman. Go think of something we could have stolen."

All that idiotic nonsense was what one had to accept with Lord Bob. Under the guise of a fool he was an inordinate jester. He seemed never quite to come out of his pose, if indeed it was a pose; and there was a sort of erratic method in his idiocy.

Briefly, Lord Bob was having trouble with his landlord. The unconscionable rascal would not renew the lease unless the six months' arrears were paid; and Lord Bob was very much concerned in finding some excuse that would, as he put it, appease the "rapacity of the rascal" for a time.

Jackman, who he said was not wholly unfamiliar—as I might have suspected—with the art of plumbing, had tampered with some bathroom pipes so there had been a small flood; and Lord Bob had used that as an excuse for being indignant with the landlord. Such a house—a man might be drowned in his bed! He would sue for damages and mental discomfort. By Saint Solomon, he would move. No, the landlord wouldn't let him move—not until the arrears were settled.

That had made Lord Bob very well contented with the arrangement; but now the avaricious landlord was changing his mind and suggesting that Lord Bob get out, intimating that it was better to lose six months' rent than eighteen. He wound up by telling me that if I did not want to be disturbed by the horrid noise of a landlord's voice I had better lend him a certain sum of money, running into the hundreds.

He would give me his note. Yes, gladly. Oh, indeed, he would be delighted. Either I must do that or suggest something that would touch the stony heart of that "rapacious rascal."

I had disposed of my money in such a way that I could draw against it as Mr. Richards, so I gave him a check. The next day he split the check between a tailor and a jeweler—the former to pay something on an account, the latter to purchase a trinket for the woman known to the sensation-loving public as the most wicked in the world, Zoronna Symondi. "Zoronna the Sorceress" she called herself on the great, flaring, lurid posters which, but a few weeks before, I had seen billboarded in New York.

Eventually I took more direct methods to appease the landlord; and Lord Bob, learning of it, told me I was a wastrel, a spendthrift. But he thrust his personal note into my hand—and, as always, in time he paid it.

THEN I met Zoronna Symondi.

Lord Bob and Jackman had gone out late in the afternoon. From the way they dressed and a few remarks that Lord Bob made, I guessed that they were going out on the bay. Lord Bob owned a fast little cabin cruiser, though to keep it out of the hands of restless creditors he had made it over to Jackman.

Lord Bob was painfully particular about his clothes, but I fancied that Jackman had been selected more for his ability to run a boat than to groom a bachelor. Lord Bob, I well knew, was not nearly so much of a fool as it pleased him to pretend; and it was not easy for me to believe that he, who appeared perpetually in need of money, would keep a cruiser for the infrequent use and small social pleasure he made of it. But other people's business is none of mine.

I had settled myself in one of the deepest chairs to put in some hours looking over the magazines. The very proper postal authorities at that time—and in these, I believe—object to corrupting the youth of its nation by French magazines; but some way or other Lord Bob not only got them, but evidently had been getting them for a long time.

"They may be wicked, but they are witty," he said, screwing in his monocle and glaring at me accusingly.

I reminded him that by the reverse of that epigram he would be made out a veritable innocent.

He claimed that my insult was unforgivable. Innocent! The idea. There was nothing so shameful as to intimate that a fellow might as well have been born and raised in a convent.

"Jackman, do you think I am an innocent?" he demanded, drawing himself very erect and waiting with the attitude of a lawyer who has practised much before a mirror.

"No, sir. I would not say, sir, that you are innocent, but that you admire innocence in others, sir."

"You're stupid, Jackman. Go out an' see if you can find a taxi that'll give us credit to the wharf. Tell 'em," he shouted as Jackman went to the door, "tell 'em my credit's good. I owe Cleve's sixteen hundred dollars."

Cleve's was a jewelry store.

Jackman bowed and went on.

"Admire innocence," he said ruminatingly, blinking at me through his monocle. "Yes. I paid twelve hundred dollars for a pair of shoe-buckles. She said, 'How lovely'—just like that. 'How lovely,' as though I'd found a seed pearl in an oyster stew.

"An' when I dropped in yesterday I saw 'em on the feet o' the maid that opened the door. I took three hundred dollars o' your money an' bought a hat-pin. Yes. She wore the pin. So I'm satisfied. Innocent!"

I demanded of whom he was talking.

"Zoronna Symondi."

And, shoving his hands deep into the furred pockets of his overcoat, he strode out; and left me to the "witty" magazines.

TIME is something to which I pay no attention when I have nothing to do. It must have been rather late when the door was quickly, quietly opened and in a noiseless way, with long cape afloat almost as if she glided without feet touching the floor, a woman ran across the room toward me.

"Lord Bob? Lord Bob? Please, I must see him. It is fearfully urgent!" she exclaimed, coming closer in the direct, confident way of a woman to whom nothing has ever been denied.

I do not like to be rushed, ever, by anybody. I like to look people over carefully before I get far into a conversation with them. Enough things have happened in my experiences to make me feel that one is wise to think all strangers dangerous, particularly all strange women, and more particularly all women strange enough to throw a twelve-hundred-dollar pair of shoe-buckles to their maids.

I knew she was Zoronna Symondi largely because I knew that she could be no one else. I had seen her, as perhaps a million people had seen her.

Her act was very theatrical; a wild show of blood and mystery, with uncanny suggestions of the supernatural—perhaps easily enough arranged with mirrors, lights, wires, traps and mechanical devices. I know nothing of the theater's mechanics; but she and her troupe held the audience, all audiences, fascinated.

On the stage she wore an array of costumes; sometimes she had glittered from head to feet, and sometimes she seemed to have found the smallest leaf on a very young fig-tree. I had never been closer to her than about the fifteenth row, orchestra, and I might not have recognized her at sight if the meeting had been more formal.

In the height of popularity she had abruptly canceled her engagement. The papers spoke of "temperament," and revamped scandals about her.

"Zoronna the Sorceress;" she had come out of Europe some months before with a score of stories clinging to her name. Europe, said the papers, was mad over her; but papers will say almost anything if encouraged from one side by expensive advertising, and assisted on the other side by imaginative young men who call themselves "publicity directors" and are known more generally as "press agents."

I haven't a doubt in the world that she nurtured and spread those scandals as less clever women create myths about their beauty. Any story is a "myth" that makes out that any one woman is the most beautiful in the world, or possibly of any village, much less of a city. Nor can there be such a thing as the most wicked woman in the world. The rivalry is too great.

Zoronna, caring little for her reputation and much for her publicity, inflamed curiosity. Nothing so sets people on tiptoes as the chance to see a wicked woman if she is at all passable in appearance. Remember the theatrical contracts that women make after an acquittal for murder; remember the sordid details of the trial which are followed with enormous interest; and one can understand why Zoronna found it profitable to be thought wicked. She played to packed houses at double prices.

Zoronna was too spectacular to be sordid. No one seemed to know from where she came, or anything of her early life. But scandal had it that many men had died for love of her; her kiss was a kiss of death.

Petrograd, then St. Petersburg, was where she first made her appearance; and a nephew of the Czar had killed himself, holding her picture to his lips. Some people, of a less romantic nature than the general public, said that Nihilists had shot the young libertine, and that likely as not he had never heard of Zoronna. That was an exaggeration, for she had stormed St. Petersburg and then moved on to Vienna.

I had met, and had for friends, a Russian and his wife. The wife was the woman whose death had brought me down upon Hurgronje. This Russian and his wife had not been in St. Petersburg at the time, nor had they spoken to me of Zoronna except casually; but they had said that she had inspired many Russians—and Russian nobles are always prodigal with favors—with an almost ruinous generosity; and she was reported to be wealthy.

Probably more had been done for Zoronna's necromatic kiss by a young Russian poet than could have been done by all the adroit press agents without his help. He was a starveling, and like an amazing number of Russians thought suicide was a way out of trouble. It may be, but I doubt if the Fates who often with seeming malignancy load a man's shoulders are to be so easily evaded; and it is my fancy that there are as many ways of getting into trouble after death as before it.

Anyway the poet had seen Zoronna, and he wrote a poem called "The Kiss" and killed himself. Shortly afterward the licentious son of a grand duke was also found dead; and in hushing the matter up after the traditional manner of the Russian Court, whispering scandal put her picture into his hands; and, remembering the feverish poem of the dead starveling, credited her kiss with what the Nihilists claimed for their bullet.

Vienna contributed to the legends of Zoronna; and when she reached Paris a fetish was made of her name. Fashions followed her. What she wore became law. The hectic French fops, later to astonish the world with steel nerves and courage on battle-fields, besieged her hotel and ruined themselves with gifts.

A duel—several, it was said; but one seems to be authenticated—was fought in the dawn because of her smiles; and she—so report had it—was a masked onlooker from a near-by carriage. She rewarded the victor with a kiss. A week later he killed himself.

She went over Europe, and her name grew and grew. Theatrical managers finally got her to New York, and after a great success she vanished; and, so to speak, reappeared in Lord Bob's apartment with only me to welcome her.

IT WAS an interesting honor thus forced upon me; but I would just as soon that Lord Bob would have been there. I shall probably make Zoronna seem ridiculous in trying to describe her. Just as I could not possibly give anything near a likeness if I took paint and canvas and a brush, so I am anything but skilful with a pen in describing women, none of whom I understand anyway.

After the first second or so, in which I was a little surprized, perhaps rather dazzled, I had the impression of having seen her before, without at all associating her with the woman I remembered amid the grotesque scenery on the stage. That impression passed away for a time; but in a most tantalizing way, again and again, I tried to place the vague resemblance.

It was scarcely a resemblance, for Zoronna was unlike any woman that I ever met; not in her beauty, for many women have that, some of them too much of it. I mean that mere regularity of so-called perfection of features is usually combined with an inanity of expression that serves very well for the models of some artists; but such faces and the women that have them are soon tiresome.

There was a strangeness about Zoronna's face that scarcely admitted the use of the word "beauty." One was not likely to think of her as pretty; nor did Lord Bob's descriptive phrase of "tempestuous little devil" entirely convey her personality.

Her hair was black, bobbed and inclined toward curls. It was not only black, but glossily black; so I suppose that nature had been assisted in giving it that sheen. The mysteries of milady's toilet are unknown to me, but they are wonderful. When she came into the room she wore a band woven of gold with a large red stone in the front; at the side a small cluster of red stones formed the buckle, from which rose a shimmeringly black aigret.

There was a theatrical air of unreality about her that was greatly increased by her eyes, which were vividly tawny, almost yellowish; such eyes as some cats have and a few Gipsies. Nor was it their color that fascinated, but rather the play of expression in them.

Her personality, such as it was, wilful, audacious, artful, was reflected in every gesture, every feature, every bit of adornment and dress; but her eyes were a language in themselves. She could say almost anything she wished without speaking; yet she spoke readily enough.

Her mouth was blood red, too red for beauty, but uncolored, unpainted. I will not pretend that I *know* that; I know that Lord Bob, who though madly in love with her was too cynical to lie about a woman's beauty, swore that the lips were just as the devil made them.

Her complexion was slightly sun-colored, not quite so dark as aged vellum. The cheek-bones were high, prominent, the nose inclined to be broad. I would have guessed, almost at a second glance, that there was a tincture of Asiatic blood in her, and the merest suggestion of a slant to her eyes.

One did not notice this at the time so much as remember it. I knew but one other woman whose eyes had that almost imperceptible slant; it was her jewels that I had in the soft broad belt about my waist.

Zoronna wore a dark, very dark, purple-brocaded satin evening cloak. She pushed this open and placed her fingers to her hip as she stood waiting for me to say something. She had removed the glove from that hand; the fingers were loaded with rings. She slapped the long white glove impatiently as I took so much time to reply.

It would have taken an hour to look at her carefully; there was a bewildering richness and brilliancy about her dress. The cloak was lined with black silk; her dress was of an ebony black and flaming yellow.

"I *must* know where Lord Bob is," she said.

Her eyes were on me studiously, as if rapidly discovering all about me preparatory to putting me into some one of the classified pigeon-holes into which women poke all the men they know.

I assured her that I could not tell her the first thing as to his whereabouts.

With a gesture and a flash of her eyes, and not a sound, she seemed to ask pointedly—

"Can't, or won't?"

It may have been imagination on my part; but I explained that I did not know where he could be found, and did not have the least idea of when he could be expected to come back.

"But he said if I ever wanted him he would be here!"

There was a queenly petulancy in her tone, and she looked—or seemed to look—appraisingly at me.

I did not say that I would be glad to be of service. I did not offer to substitute for Lord Bob. I did not even ask her to sit down. I had stood up when she came in, and I thought it concession enough if I remained standing.

"What *shall* I do?" she demanded, not helplessly—far from it—there was nothing helpless in the manner or personality of that woman; but she commanded rather than demanded.

I suggested that she leave any message she wished, and I would see that it reached Lord Bob as soon as he came through the door.

"That wouldn't do. I must have him tonight. Now. I simply must. He promised to be ready any moment that I wanted him. You are Mr. Richards? Bob has told me of you."

I hoped, but inaudibly, that he had not told the truth. When a man is mad over a woman a little thing like a pledge of secrecy made to a friend will not keep him silent. It is unreasonable to suppose that such a pledge should when he throws away money, life and soul.

One of the many reasons that I liked Lord Bob—or Robert Calversley, as he was more formally known—was that in spite of his fluent nonsense he appeared to have the gift of holding his tongue. He asked no inquisitive questions. He did not know into what sort of trouble I had got myself that I chose to be a Mr. Richards. A man with secrets of his own generally does not ply meddling questions.

I ASKED, of course, what he had told her of me. He had said that I was his best friend, and the only man he knew who had sense enough to trust him. I replied that in such an opinion he was perhaps deceived by my not having anything that needed to be kept secret.

Her eyes were disconcertingly direct and intense. I had the feeling that I knew what she wanted, but I was not sure. I thought she wanted me to offer to serve her, that she was piqued, almost offended as a vain woman would be, by my disinclination to be gallant.

Yet there was such a sustained scrutiny from her eyes, such an appearance of interest with something of an affectation of indifference, that I could not be confident of what she might have in her head.

She walked to a chair and sat down, flinging her loose glove to the table and fingering a key. It must have been the key to the apartment-house which no doubt Lord Bob had given her, perhaps had duplicated from his own.

She looked about her carelessly, eying various objects, and poked some of the scattered magazines with the point of her very small black-satin slipper. Incidentally the long, narrow buckles seemed to be set with diamonds.

"Ah, from France! Blessed, dear land! It was there I met Lord Bob. I *must* find him at once. It is extremely urgent. I know of no one else to whom I can appeal—because—because—" she was watching me closely—"I need some one who is not afraid."

The invitation was almost explicit, but I was not tempted. A woman readily believes that any man is instantly fearless if she urges him to run risks for her. I am not fearless; and least of all when a woman is engaged in mysterious maneuvers.

Zoronna Symondi was like a flame burning on a pine knot; it changes color, it flares briefly in first one direction and another, it is intense. She was restless without seeming nervous, and every move and gesture she made would have been a pose if she had paused long enough to make a tableau effect.

She told me how much she valued Lord Bob; he was a fine, generous, brave fellow. She must find him. Couldn't I tell her where he was?

"I am in such trouble," she added, looking at me, not pleadingly, not calculatingly, but with something of the gaze of a gambler who watches the ball on the spinning wheel, and yet is more interested in the game than in the stakes.

I saw very well that she had made up her mind to entice me into the mysterious service for which she had sought Lord Bob—the fop whom she had the penetration to judge as far different from what he seemed; but I did not intend to be enticed. It does not please me to have a woman's thumb and finger to my rather long nose, leading me where she wishes.

Zoronna sat back with a little sigh and nearly closed her eyes, but through the slits of lids she was watching me. Her lashes were long and dark, no doubt blackened, but effectively so; and the glint of yellow—almost of yellow light—that came from under them was not unlike the light that might have been in a barbaric queen's eyes as she stared, not wholly unamused, at some poor stubborn courtier. This impression was increased by the suggestion of a smile, a smile so faint as not to affect the lines of her lips.

"I tell you," she said slowly, her voice low, clear, not soft but far from harsh, or even cold, "I tell you, I am in danger. Personal danger. It would be unwise of me to tell you—a stranger. But Hurgronje——"

She stopped.

Not a muscle of my face or fingers moved. Nature, as if ironically playing a trick on my very respectable and somewhat religious family, gave me the cold, emotionless nerves without which a card-gambler might as well take to a pick-handle and turn ditch-digger; and night after night, through year upon year, of sitting at the green baize tables, enduring the gaze of hard-eyed men, some angrily alert to catch me cheating at those very moments when I could not afford to trust to luck and must pluck the cards I needed; the many times in which some bully, perhaps hired, or perhaps half-drunk and seeking the fame of having killed so well-known a man as myself, had unexpectedly come after a quarrel—all of those things and others had given me a mask-like control and immobility, but had not made me quite so bloodless, so nerveless, as rumor would have it.

I would not believe it was accident that had made her mention Hurgronje to me, and yet I could not believe that she knew Hurgronje was the one name which would set me in motion. My thoughts were caught up in a whirlwind and raced along, but I looked at her coldly with my face scarcely more than half-turned toward her. For all that I could tell the name "Hurgronje" might have slipped from her.

"Hurgronje?" I repeated as if the sound were strange to my ears.

"Yes. Hurgronje. You know of him?"

It was entirely a question.

"Hurgronje? The name sounds foreign. These foreigners are always threatening suicide on a woman's doorstep. I can understand."

"I doubt it," she flashed a little maliciously, conveying—or seeming to convey—that my veins were too cold to understand what men maddened by love might do.

"Who is Hurgronje?" I asked a little sympathetically.

I knew that he trapped women when he could, robbed them, murdered them if his ingenuity could make it seem safe. Perhaps he might love, or show the emotionalism that in fiction and criminal courts passes for love, toward so flaming a woman as this; but more likely, I guessed, his real love would be for the gems she wore, for the others she was reported to own.

BUT a very large and suspicious thought demanded attention. This woman was what might be called a theatrical "splendor," artful in stage mysteries and "supernatural" scenery through which was threaded a wild plot. Hurgronje was a professional magician, but kept off the stage. It was not inconceivable that she should be allied with the men who were likely to find their deaths crouching in the chambers of my guns. True, she sought publicity. They seemed after secrecy and got more than they deserved.

I would have given almost anything, everything, I owned at that moment to have had the truth from her; but I would not have believed her, no matter what she told. She might be a victim or a lure. There was only one way to find out, and that was to do whatever she proposed.

"Personal danger?" I asked when she had declined to answer further as to who Hurgronje was. "If it isn't too personal I would be interested to hear just what it is."

It was apparently with much hesitancy that she told me. As a woman can simulate hesitancy, boldness or anything else she wishes, I had no way of knowing how much was art and how much was fact. Had she known who I was and all about me she could not have conceived of a more effective story for getting me to do as she wished.

As she talked I looked at her closely. That nebulous resemblance to something or some one whom I could not identify, though I had the feeling that long before I should have done so, persisted.

She said briefly that Hurgronje was coming to her rooms between twelve and one o'clock that night; and that she was afraid to be alone with him; that she had counted on having Lord Bob behind a screen as a sort of guardian in reserve.

To my inquiry again as to who Hurgronje was she gave no answer except that he was a man of whom she was afraid. I mentioned the police and she shuddered. That would be worse, she said, than Hurgronje.

"What do you fear from him?" I asked.

"Anything. He might do anything."

"Why a visit at such an hour?"

"It pleases him to have it so," she said.

"And his pleasure is placed above your own?"

Her eyes seemed rather indignantly to tell me that if I were as bold in action as I was in questions I must be a courageous person.

I insisted that she should tell me who Hurgronje was, not so much because I wanted to hear what she would say as because I knew it might seem queer to her if I did not insist.

"He put me on the stage. I am Zoronna Symondi."

I nodded slightly as if her name meant little or nothing to me; and an angry color came into her face, for she had looked intently, expecting that I would show some surprize, admiration, or at least something by way of tribute.

An angry little exclamation in French escaped her, but I did not pretend to understand. If she wanted to call me a cold beast I could hardly feel offended.

I asked if she had really wanted Lord Bob to go along with her and be present at the interview. She said that she wanted him to be behind a screen; that she wasn't a coward, but she knew Hurgronje, though she did not know what he wanted. I saw no reason why I could not lurk behind a screen as well as any other man, and said so, but without showing much eagerness and no gallantry.

This attitude of mine did not greatly delight her. She seemed rather of two minds about it; but either because she knew what she was about and wanted me there or because she really did have some fear, she at last said that it would be a very great favor to her.

And so I went.

A: HURGRONJE said that he was an Egyptian and knew all about the ancient mysteries of Isis. When I first heard of him I did not know much about Isis, and don't yet; but I was curious enough to buy a book or two, out of which I got the impression that she was rather a scandalous goddess who had been dead some thousands of years.

In ten minutes of reading I probably knew more about Isis than Hurgronje—who would just as soon have claimed that he was a Carthaginian and was intimate with all the mysteries of Baal. He would make any claims that seemed likely to impress anybody.

The main thing is that he did know a lot about creating mysterious effects, about stage scenery, about a dark and imposing rôle; he was an astounding liar, and proved astoundingly credible in the minds of many people whose neighbors probably thought they were well balanced and sane; though likely enough if Hurgronje had caught and concentrated on the neighbors themselves he would have impressed, if not influenced, them also.

He raised the dead and talked with them; and in his work he probably had whatever help the devil could give him. He claimed to be able to do all manner of uncanny things; and he could seemingly do many of them, for he was an inventive, ingenious rascal, so that he awed and terrified many persons with whom he became intimate; and occasionally inspired them to great faith, if not almost to reverence for himself, or at least for the "powers" that he ascribed to himself.

On the stage his troupe would have excelled the uncanny effects got by Zoronna Symondi, though he could never have duplicated her personality, which after all was the secret of her success. But he found it more to his liking, perhaps more to his profit, to keep out of public places. The scoundrel was rich, and something more than greed must have kept him at his exalted voodooism.

He enjoyed the diabolism of terrifying people; he fed gluttonously on the awe that he inspired; he profited to an almost unbelievable amount by the credulity he created. He sometimes claimed that he could destroy people merely by his curses; but he was mistaken. I lost no sleep even with them ringing in my ears.

Hurgronje, for all of his cleverness and intimacy with the so-called "powers of darkness," was exceedingly timid; though he was, when secure from detection, as brutal as any man could be. His manner of operating was after this fashion:

He would go into a city and quietly engage some house, always a large one, that seemed suitable for his operations. It was always in a fashionable neighborhood. At times he bought it outright, though usually leased the house. Then he employed a lot of workmen to change things about, or in other words to set the scenery and put in wires and dynamos by which the dead were to be raised.

He had money and he spent money; and he would do anything for money. His outlay was extravagant. He was no fly-by-night, no pickpocket adventurer. He posed as a rich, dignified, scholarly gentleman out of the Orient. Put a fez or turban on a man's head, blacken his face, pin a flowing robe on to him, and half the women of America are ready to fall on to their knees in attitudes of adoration.

But Hurgronje was superior to such cheap theatricalism. He did not want half the women of America crowding around his knees. His interest was in rich women, particularly rich widows, and occasionally in rich men.

He did not wear a turban or fez. He seldom appeared in public, but by all the arts and evasive elusiveness known to him tried to keep from being generally talked about or even known.

Earlier in his career, in European cities, he had occasionally used publicity. He now sought obscurity and avoided "fame."

In the privacy of his Hall of Darkness he might appear in all the ceremonial regalia befitting a Master of Mysteries, a High Priest of Isis, a Seneschal of the Secret City, or whatever other titles he and the devil had agreed upon.

I have doubts about his even being an Egyptian. All the Egyptians I ever saw—and I stopped off to look at the pyramids and sand-piles during a long round-the-world trip that I took one time when certain nervous people in police uniforms were scratching around to uncover me—as I was saying, the only Egyptians I saw were thin fellows with peaked faces; some long fellows, some short, but most of them scrawny; and the whole lot of them were unimpressive, whining thieves and beggars.

There is a tribe of travelers who will hasten to assure me that I saw only the fellahs, the riffraff; that is the usual traveler's way of claiming to have been intimate with the aristocracy.

By his appearance one might have judged that Hurgronje belonged to a race of kings. He was rapacious, thievish, unscrupulous enough to have been a king, a real king; not merely a monarchial figurehead that spoke of his "dear" subjects—and meant it.

I have never lied about a man because I did not like him, so I must say that Hurgronje was a man of great size, built like a statue, erect, with a strong personality and the most remarkable voice that I ever heard—the voice of a great, great actor. Had he not been such a man, and in possession of such a voice, not all the arts of his mechanics and mysteries would have given him his influence. He looked the part that he played, and he played it with the skill of a Cagliostro, the Prince of Scoundrels.

It probably had infuriated him that a little obscure California gambler, who consorted with petty crooks, remained unimpressed when one who could raise the mighty dead thundered curses upon his head. And, of course, as curses never do harm unless the victim knows of them, Hurgronje took elaborate precautions to make me terrified—after he had seductively offered to share the jewels if I would return them. I remained unseduced and unterrified.

I have been cursed by men who could have taught Hurgronje. They did not use long, obscure phrases about things of which I had to go to a dictionary to learn; but cut loose with hard, direct words, usually to the accompaniment of gun-fire or a gleaming knife-thrust. He was infuriated, not only because I had taken away his jewels, but because I had killed some of his "mighty dead." If they had been good servants he ought to have raised them again.

But to tell a little more of his methods. After he remodeled the house that had been selected as most suitable for his mysteries, and filled it lavishly with a great assortment of valuable and queer stuff, he would appear in person. I suppose he appeared from the first and kept even farther in the background than after he "officially" took up his residence in it. When one must fix a wall, for instance, so that it will noiselessly slide out of the way and reveal some ghostly tableau, a man so careful in detail as Hurgronje would be likely to stand over the work with a watchful eye.

The sliding wall was only one of numerous tricks. Figures would materialize right in the center of the room and disappear by "magic." Trap-doors and mirrors will work wonders of which the ancients—whose secrets he claimed to possess—did not dream.

When Hurgronje had taken possession of the house he gave no entertainments and accepted no invitations. He had no statements to make to the press, and he kept very much out of sight.

But his time was not spent in idleness. He ferreted out secrets and scandals about people. He learned local biographies and studied dates and data.

When all was ready he would politely, formally, communicate with some silly rich woman who he had learned was already predisposed toward esotericism or something of that kind, and convey to her a message from the "dead." The message was certain to be astonishing and accurate; and the woman, eager and strangely moved, would almost without fail hasten to visit the marvelous man. If she did not prove so silly as he expected, nothing was lost; nothing was injured. She simply went her way, perhaps always to wonder if she had not made a mistake in not really believing that Hurgronje had supernatural powers.

Sooner or later he would find the ideal victim, who would confide in her friends, and the friends would confide in others, and scores would soon be begging to be admitted to intimacy with the wonderful man. So the great game would be on.

HURGRONJE was crafty and he was murderous. He did not like to have blood on his own handsome hands, and he did not want dead bodies around where the police might find them. He used at times, when it seemed safe, an ingenious and diabolical way of getting hold of people's fortunes and at the same time of getting them out of the way.

I haven't a doubt that he ever failed to pull money out of almost everybody who had the least faith in him; and perhaps he would not have hesitated to cut a throat to get a few gold-pieces if the throat—and the gold-pieces—belonged to some lowly persons about whom inquiries were not likely to be made. It was an instance of such avaricious impatience that had brought me, with guns ablaze, upon him.

But not even one who had command over the dead, who could float at will through air and transport himself from continent to continent in the twinkling of an eye, who could dematerialize solid bodies into vapor and do many other impossible things, could easily dispose of a rich woman, get her fortune and keep angry heirs from poking into his business.

It would be wrong to imagine that his victims of this kind were counted in large numbers. Not at all. If he got one victim only rarely he was satisfied, and well might be.

It is astonishing, almost appalling, how many sober people will grow foolish if they are encouraged to believe that they can dabble with the supernatural. Hurgronje, apparently, could. And he made other people believe that they could.

What I say will likely make some people impatiently skeptical, but others out of their own experience and observation will know that it, or know that other things much like it, are true. Hurgronje would tell those to whom he seemed to take a particular fancy that, since the so-called civilization of modern times had begun to overspread the earth, the keepers of the ancient mysteries had fled into the Himalayan Mountains. There they had created a wonderful secret city, builded like the cities of ancient times, and they had handed down their secrets from generation to generation.

And I must pause here to insist earnestly that similar stuff to this *is* taught more or less secretly by numerous mystics and so-called initiates; and Tibet is usually designated as the location of these wise men who know all about the ancient mysteries. I do not know how true or false the teachings of others are, or to what glory the pilgrims that try to get there arrive; I do know that Hurgronje was a diabolical faker and scoundrel, and I have never had reason to believe that any other teachers of the same sort of mysticism were anything else.

Hurgronje, in that wonderfully hypnotic voice of his, holding an impressive pose with his magnificent body, would say that those admitted to the mysteries could put aside the flesh as one puts aside a cloak; and the spirit, swift as thought, could circle the world, listen to all secrets, see behind drawn blinds and pass through stone, or any kind of walls. He claimed such power for himself.

The chosen of that secret city never died in the ordinary sense of the dreaded word. At last they simply grew weary of the flesh and so less and less frequently returned to wear it; and finally, forgetting it altogether, soared upward to some star of unimaginable delectation.

There was much that he told, but it sounds so like nonsense that I am tired of repeating it. Yet people believed him, as they do believe that and things equally incredible.

But I must not neglect to put in what was probably the most seductive part of his story. Within this secret city, youth was restored. Women became young again, and infinitely more beautiful than at the most charming period of their lives; and men found their handsomeness and vigor restored.

True, they could never leave the city once they had passed the tests and been initiated; but—ah! They could float as swift as thought to any part of the earth, though their fleshy vestments must remain in the city.

To become a member of this choice company, one had first to belong to a certain spiritual caste. A person could not know whether or not she was a member of this caste, but Hurgronje could tell at a glance.

The first thing was to belong to this caste—this mystical nobility. The next was to undergo certain tests and initiations. As nearly as I could perceive none but the wealthy belonged to the fortunate caste; and their severest test was to put all of their wealth into portable form and they were supposed to bear it with them until they arrived at the entrance of the city, then as a great act of worldly renunciation to fling it into a pit that was just outside of the walls. If they left any of that wealth behind, they would be denied admittance—for they could have no secrets from the keepers of the mysteries, as no earthly, uninitiated people could have secrets from the initiates.

They must—as part of the test—oppose the pleadings of heirs, of friends, and say nothing, give no explanations, except that they were retiring to a monastery in Tibet. If they so much as breathed a syllable of explanation beyond that, they would be considered to have failed in the test; and they would not only be rejected, but punished by the swift and watchful spirits of the secret and holy city.

Also they must make the journey alone; though of course, Hurgronje said, they would be attended by watchful guardians, some in flesh, some in the spirit. For all that the pilgrim could tell, the waiter at their table on shipboard might be a powerful initiate on watch over her.

It is difficult for sane people, or rather people in moments of sanity, to believe that any such scheme could catch a victim; but let those who do not know to what idiocy people have been and are daily being reduced by metaphysical "mysteries" hold their peace, for there are other people who do know from intimate contact that I have not exaggerated. In a small, meager, paltry way, hundreds of "mystics" and "esoterics" in every city thrive; and séances of one kind and another are held nightly by the scores, where poor, trembling, anxious girls and women and men lay small but precious offerings on tables for the "professor" or the "madame," who promises, and pretends to give, a peep behind the mystic curtains.

I was not fully aware of Hurgronje's elaborate methods when, coldly murderous, I went through a window into his Hall of Darkness and sent part of his troupe so far toward hell that not even his most powerful incantations could draw them back. And I shall try to be brief in telling how it came about.

I HAD met some time before a queer Russian by the name of Kraschenin. I sometimes thought that he had more money than the Great Mogul, for a more reckless gambler was rarely seen, nor one who would drink more brandy and show the effect so slightly.

For some reason Kraschenin liked me. He was a big, black-complexioned fellow, violent in his joys and anger; and I gathered that he had been into trouble in his own country. I met his wife and liked her.

He died of some extremely scientific disease, died suddenly. Had he been less wealthy the diagnosis would probably have been an alcoholic heart.

Madame Kraschenin was lonely. I had been better thought of by her husband than I realized; she assumed his friendship with me, or at least assumed that I was her friend out of the common admiration for Kraschenin. His memory was scarcely less dear to her than he had been in person; and she would gladly have been his slave if wifehood had been denied her.

She was a rather tall, dark woman of middle age, striking in appearance, though her eyes were of a peculiar brownish color and inclined to be slanting; the cheek-bones were very prominent, the nostrils wide and the mouth rather large. The mouths of generous women are always too large for what is called "beauty."

She made no pretense of sorrow, but seemed rather to suppress than display it; I never saw either sighs nor tears from her, yet her manner, her countenance, was definitely suggestive of great loneliness, a greater restlessness.

In the course of more companionship than I ever had from another woman who was not in some way related to me Madame Kraschenin gradually became one of the dearest friends I ever knew, and she, I believe unintentionally, caused me to guess at least a part of the reason why she not only loved her strange husband but was also deeply grateful to him.

It seemed, as nearly as I could gather without ever asking a question, that Kraschenin was of an influential, if not indeed a noble, family; and he had brought down upon him the displeasure of friends and family by marrying her. Once in almost as many words she said that she had been a wild little creature; and, in a kind of careless, jesting way that may or may not have been serious, she said:

"My grandmother was the daughter of a mandarin; my grandfather, a Spanish Gipsy. I had nothing but a face that my husband thought was beautiful."

At another time quite proudly she remarked:

"A wild, mad man, that husband of mine, but a brave man and true. He never caused me a really unhappy minute. . . . Do you believe the dead live?"

That was an odd thing for her to say, and she said it in a way that silenced jesting, even if I had been inclined to jest. Another time with a kind of empty-eyed thoughtfulness she said:

"My two maids are chaperons enough for a widow. It doesn't matter what people say of me. *He* knows. Sometimes I feel that he is very near."

She had at first made me a little uneasy by coming into my apartment. But with her it was sheer loneliness and restlessness. I know that she really felt herself answerable to none but her husband's shade, which, determinedly, fondly, she coaxed herself into believing was always near her.

At that time I had a valet, or what passed for a valet. I did not want him. By profession he was a pickpocket, a little, nervous, wiry, cynical but superstitious, impudent fellow, who felt that my rooms were sanctuary.

He was a clever all-round crook, but seemed to think that picking pockets was most suitable for his genius. He had wandered far and been many things from bartender to circus acrobat. I was under some obligations, so that I could not very well resent his intrusions or repulse his company. He was a pallid, lean-faced, sharp-nosed fellow by the name of John Gay, and given to the use of cocain. But he was loyal to those to whom he gave his friendship.

That is a great thing, loyalty. Sometimes I think it the greatest thing that man can have. I have an idea, though perhaps I have no right to opinions on matters theological, that any applicant at the Pearly Gate who can show that he has been a loyal friend and gone through dangers purely as a matter of friendship, will be looked upon with more favor than some of the people who have fewer sins upon their heads.

Madame Kraschenin oddly enough took a fancy to John Gay. His cynical, quick remarks seemed to be a pleasing stimulant. The only time I ever heard her laugh was when listening to some of his picaresque stories, for he had made his living by the skill of his fingers and his wit, and he had a lively, humorous cynicism with which he told his experiences; and it gave her entertainment, something she seemed unable to find elsewhere. She was a remarkable woman—sad without being depressing, generous, impulsive, yet never without dignity.

I am sure that, if the dead—as she so pathetically wondered—do live, her "barbarian" husband hovered near her, fully appreciative of her faithfulness and love of him. If so, with what terrible impotency he—himself a mad, violent Russian nobleman—must have dealt impalpable blows and uttered inaudible curses when, through love of him, she was trapped and murdered by Hurgronje; and with what avenging fury that fierce Russian must have welcomed the dead I sent to him.

I think that I have already shown, without stopping to be specific, that Madame Kraschenin was likely to be susceptible to the "esoteric" roguery of Hurgronje. She began to speak of him from time to time. I knew that she was a restless woman, already nearly convinced that a very thin and perhaps penetrable veil separated her from her "dear barbarian;" and I imagined Hurgronje was merely an esotericist of some sort who was no doubt fully aware that she was in a position to pay well; and, unwisely, it seemed to me that I had no right to interpose my skepticism.

Most of the people in the world think—most of the martyrs now enshrined in glory have thought—more of their delusions than of their lives; and if a faker could trick her into any kind of happiness, I felt that his fee would have been very well earned. I was wrong, of course.

I began to feel it that day when she said that she was going to Tibet to enter a monastery. My knowledge of religious matters is limited and vague; but I did know enough to be puzzled that a woman should think of entering a monastery; I heard from her, however, that in Tibet women could be monks.

Her life and her affairs were her own. In a general geographic way she had come out of that part of the world. I thought it probably some sort of traveling adventure that she was being urged into more by her restlessness than by any real monastic impulse.

She went on to explain that she had no friends in any part of the world; that she had long ago lost sight of her own nomadic family; that she was intensely disliked by her husband's people; that she felt she could be happy in Tibet; and that she was going.

I found afterward that she had told John Gay a great deal about Hurgronje's "mysteries." Gay was a superstitious fellow. He believed in "ghosts and things." What she told of Hurgronje's wonders made Gay feverishly excited and curious, as was natural in an ignorant little crook who trusted in fortune-tellers and was afraid of spooks.

I assured him that it took no clairvoyant nor prophetic gifts to read his fortune.

"Beware," I said, "of all flat-footed gentlemen with stars on their chests."

He snorted in high contempt, then tried earnestly to get me interested in some of the "psychic" experiences that had happened to him. It is needless to repeat them; and I do not purpose to tell the ghost-stories of other people. I myself have seen many ghosts, mostly of wire and cloth; and I have never yet seen any other kind that wouldn't yell if it was shot in the leg.

Gay, meddlesome, furtive and boiling with curiosity, had crept into Hurgronje's house to look it over with the calculating eye of one who knows more about locks and bolts than the man who owns them. He was soon an uninvited spectator. In the course of his circus and fake-show experiences, he had seen and known something of the mechanics of wires and mirrors, so he was rather skeptical just at those moments when other people were most impressed.

MADAME KRASCHENIN told us good-by, and said she was leaving that evening for San Francisco. She really did not leave, but went through all the preparation of making it appear that she had done so; all of which was but a part of Hurgronje's design to make it impossible for the police, or for any one else who might become curious over her disappearance, to connect him with her departure.

What happened is that on the following evening she came, heavily veiled, about nine o'clock to Hurgronje's house. Gay was in a corner of the Hall of Darkness, hidden behind a long, dark curtain near the window, which was thought to have been very solidly locked. She carried a little satchel in her hand, and gave it to Hurgronje.

The room was dimly lighted; but Gay, peculiarly sensitive to the reflection of gold and gems, recognized them, and was made suspicious as the trinkets dripped from Hurgronje's hand, which he thrust into the satchel and withdrew, letting the ornaments fall slowly from his fingers.

The room was large and silent. Gay, excited, feared that even his breath might reveal his presence, consciously checked his breathing; and he peered, fascinated, through the little slit, barely the width of two eyes, that he made in the curtain. Slender waxed tapers burned on various niches; and directly above Hurgronje a heavy blue globe, set in the ceiling, radiated a soft vague glow that made everything below it visible but rather indistinct.

Hurgronje, tall, imposing, impressive in his long sable robe, spoke with ceremonial vagueness to the woman who stood before him. The ritualistic solemnity awed Gay. When, without warning, many dark-robed, cowled and noiseless forms emerged, one at a time, from what seemed to be a solid wall and began to circle with slow steps about Hurgronje and Madame Kraschenin, Gay, in spite of his previous skepticism, was almost convinced that they had been conjured from thin air.

Hurgronje declared, speaking sonorously, that here, moving about her, were the guardians who, remaining unknown to her all the while, would watchfully accompany her on her pilgrimage; that they would ward off all danger and sleeplessly attend her. He called them the Mystic Brotherhood of Seven.

Suddenly through the house there sounded a deep, soft, shivering, sustained note as if many great bronze bells, some in the roof, some in the basement, some near at hand, and some far away, had been lightly struck at the same instant by the same skilful hand. The sound seemed to come from all directions with quiet, arresting solemnity.

Instantly the seven robed forms stood still, and Hurgronje, with hand upraised, remained silent and motionless until the last trace of the bells' tone had faded. Then he said—

"The hour has come!"

Without sound or visible propulsion there moved across the floor what appeared to be a large bronze image, fashioned something like a picture of Isis. It stopped as if animate and acting of its own will before Madame Kraschenin; then what had appeared to to be solid, opened and exposed a hollow interior, and the interior was luminous.

No words were spoken; a slight gesture and pressure of Hurgronje's hand on her shoulder served to instruct Madame Kraschenin in what was expected. She stepped within the statue, which barely admitted her, and the doors closed with a harsh, metallic click.

At once the ritualistic spell was broken. Some one laughed. The seven figures pulled back their cowls and disclosed faces hideously amused; and one of them stepped to a switch and flooded the room with light. Hurgronje bent intently over the satchel and began spreading the jewels out on the table, and the others crowded around greedily in a way that would have disillusioned a deaf spectator.

John Gay was not deaf, but was nearly petrified. He could scarcely credit his senses; they had been so seduced, impressed, by the ceremonial solemnity of the previous minutes that this abrupt and fearful change of attitude was unbelievable.

He was not a coward, but he lacked audacious initiative for one thing; and for another he was not likely to think of meeting such numbers single-handed; but it was perhaps really because he could not make himself believe that the woman had been murdered until it was too late.

He heard, or imagined that he heard, vague cries, muffled, and even then could not force himself to realize that they came from Madame Kraschenin, who had been imprisoned in a cell of bronze.

But one thought of any importance came into Gay's head, and that was to get to me; and he was moving away to slip through the window when Hurgronje turned impatiently from the jewels and said—

"Have that thing taken out!"

Somebody went to a doorway and shouted, and at once two large negroes came in, lifted the statue between them and went toward the street entrance. Gay, having slipped from the house, saw them load it into the automobile—in which, no doubt, Madame Kraschenin had been brought—and drive away.

As quickly as he could, but nearly an hour later, Gay reached me in a down-town gambling-house, of which the police pretended to have no knowledge. He got in easily enough, for he was not unknown there; but he had some difficulty in making me believe him. He was trembling from head to foot, his voice was shaking, his words incoherent; but I knew him for a user of dope, and I am reluctant about getting excited over the stories of dope-fiends.

I was afraid that he had been deceived by some harmless hocus-pocus of the alleged magician; but somehow the report of the muffled cries coming from that lethal statue struck my imagination and anger simultaneously, and I saw how easily it would be for an unhuman villain to commit undetected murder for her wealth, and be rid of the body by having the statue carried to the river.

We rushed out of that house; and I, not having an automobile at hand, jumped into the first one that I found unlocked; and we were off. More than one policeman leaped from the sidewalk with an arresting hand upraised as we rushed along; but no shots were fired, and perhaps the innocent owner, the number having been taken, was troubled to prove that his car had been stolen. I do not know.

It is a wonder that we were not followed. Perhaps we were. I did not notice.

Gay knew the way, and a block from the house we stopped, and without much stealth rushed forward, using what shadows we found easily, but not pausing to be watchful.

I SCRAMBLED up to the high window which Gay had already used several times to become an unbidden spectator; and, softly edging my way in, I stood by the black curtain, listening. It would take time to repeat what I heard, and its brutality would be jarringly incredible.

The men were gloating over the ease with which the woman had been robbed of wealth and life. I am not inclined to do or to admire theatrical poses or exclamations, but I could not contain myself when some fellow, perhaps half-drunk—for there was the clinking of glasses—cried out, ". . . and who gives a ——?"

For answer I swept aside the black curtain and stood revealed, and I opened fire. The man I aimed at died. There was a roar, yells, and some voice—Hurgronje's, I know—cried just as the lights were struck out—

"Who are you?"

I told him, for I was in no mood to be anonymous. Only the vague glimmering of the weak, slender tapers remained. Perhaps scarcely more than thirty seconds passed after pandemonium started; but in that time I had advanced to the table, flung away an emptied gun, caught up a casket of gems—Hurgronje's, into which he had been placing his selection from those brought by the murdered woman—and, shooting, backed to the window, jumped out and was gone.

What happened afterward I do not know in detail. The neighborhood must have been startled, but no doubt entrance was barred until the police arrived; and if the police came at all, they were no doubt met by the plausible, suave Hurgronje, who had some kind of explanation other than the truth.

Frankly I do not know what happened. I have wondered. But Hurgronje wanted nothing to do with the police, and he was no doubt skilful enough to evade an inquiry. It would be easy to make reasonable conjectures as to how so clever and experienced a fellow as himself could have evaded such an inquiry, for his organization was as well trained as any company of actors, his resourcefulness very great.

Later I went to the head of a private detective agency—for personal reasons I scarcely dared, had I wished, to go to the police—in whom I had some little faith, and I told him the story with certain omissions, particularly omitting that the jewels had come into my hands; though I disposed of enough of those to pay him well. He took the matter up.

What he did I do not know. Very little, beyond informing me that there was no reason for not believing that Madame Kraschenin had started for San Francisco, to go by way of Hong Kong to India. So carefully had Hurgronje planned that some woman, answering her description, had used her ticket and gone as far as Chicago.

It was also from the detective agency that I learned that no report of a disturbance in Hurgronje's house had been received at police headquarters, but that Hurgronje no longer occupied that house, and that he was planning to go to San Francisco.

* * *

IT WOULD be needless, and moreover that is not a part of the story of much interest, to tell of the various ways in which Hurgronje tried to influence me. I was communicated with by letter, telephone, and every way that would avoid personal contact.

The fear that I had concealed the jewels probably for a time checked the effort at assassination. Gay himself thought that they were stowed in a safety-deposit vault. Every kind of concession was offered me if I returned them, every manner of damnation impended if I refused.

Gay disappeared. Then his body was picked up off the street and taken to the morgue.

Hurgronje even condescended to talk to me in person over the telephone; and he seemed to think that I was intensely obstinate. He said I had killed three of his men and wounded others, for which I expressed regret that the number was so few. He offered me my life if I would give up the gems, which belonged to him—all of them. He emphasized the fact that I could prove nothing; and I declined to admit the need of proof.

It was curious that he never mentioned complaining to the police; and I wonder if he noticed that I had not mentioned them. He concluded by launching curses upon me.

When my room was burglarized I naturally thought that it had been done by one of the Hurgronje men, and really gave it little reflection beyond the inconvenience caused by carrying off my suitcases and a few papers of no great importance—or they would not have been where a burglar could get them.

Then out of Pittsburg had come the story of my death.

Then out of the night had come Zoronna Symondi, asking for protection from behind a screen at an interview with Hurgronje.

I went with her.

CHAPTER II

AT THE door of her limousine, which was waiting at the curb, Zoronna paused; and, turning to me, said that no doubt she had exaggerated her anxiety; that perhaps after all she had given way to one of the moods of fear that so many times before she had found groundless. But I only bowed and waited for her to get in.

She stepped in, bending her head low so as not to strike the aigret. I followed her. The chauffeur closed the door, and we started. She put out the dome light as soon as we left the curb, and in silence and darkness we drove along, each, no doubt, with thoughts enough to keep the mind busy.

I did not try to watch the direction as it made little difference where I should arrive; but I was trying with all the concentration of which I was capable to review the meeting and conversation with Zoronna and try to guess whether accident or design had caused her to come and appeal to me. But after all, I decided, that item was unimportant; for I am by nature extremely watchful and cautious, and though a woman might deceive me she could not make me unguarded.

After climbing a stiff grade for some blocks, the limousine stopped under an archway overhung with vines, and a dim standing light burned at the top of a narrow entrance.

We got out, but I kept an eye cocked at the chauffeur, so that any time he was behind me I was watching him. That precaution was perhaps needless; but I have never yet considered any of my precautions as a waste of time.

He opened the entrance door and stepped back. Zoronna hurried in; and I followed, but dropped a glove as a pretext for facing about and waiting until he had recovered it for me, then closed the door myself. That incident is of no importance, except perhaps to show that I am not bashful about admitting my precautions.

I followed Zoronna along a narrow hall, which had neither windows nor doors opening on to it, and we came out into a larger hall that led from the more used entrance of the house, which seemed, as nearly as I could judge, to be an apartment-house. She stopped before an automatic elevator, and I opened the door. We went in, and she pressed the button for the third floor.

All of that time she had said not a word, nor did she speak until she had entered her apartment, which was just off the elevator; and then she asked me to sit down and excuse her for a minute or two.

I HAD heard, or read, something of the barbaric splendor with which Zoronna Symondi surrounded herself—of the fabulous gifts that had been made her by admirers, and of her extravagance; and I suppose that the stories were true. My own tastes are not perhaps simple, but I never had the time nor money to indulge in extravagances; and no doubt a person of true artistic perception would have been esthetically scandalized by the bizarre brilliancy of Zoronna's rooms.

She had kept her arrival and presence out of the papers, but had not been able, it appeared, to moderate her mode of living. I was to learn that not one but three apartments had been taken by her, entirely remodeled, walls knocked out, and refitted to suit her whim. This accounted for the spaciousness of the rooms.

Also I was told that in order to admit a huge mirror, which she had caused to be made to her order a year or so before, a part of the house wall had been knocked out and a wide balcony with sliding glass doors had been built at the entrance, through which the mirror had come.

Zoronna's previous troubles with this mirror, and in finding a housing for it, had often appeared in the papers—no doubt to the delight of whatever men she paid for keeping her name simmering in the press.

I can not describe the room to which I was admitted, for I am unfamiliar with the technical names of such fine stuffs as she had. When one has said that there were oil paintings, none of them large, but strange-looking things—I remember the name signed to one; Cézanne—and that the large rug was white, with a great deal of figuration in vivid colors, and seemed to be made of silk; that the walls were a creamy white that for a border had a yellow tinting, which gave one the impression of sunlight; and that all around the room to a height of about eighteen inches there ran panels of black, carved wood; that the chairs were dainty-legged affairs, upholstered with a creamy, satin-like fabric; that the only table in the room was a long, narrow, spindle-legged, fragile thing of a faintly reddish color, no doubt mahogany, and highly polished; and that the extremely heavy curtains were the color of sunlight and brocaded with gold—which seemed to me a waste of labor and money, as the gold figuration was scarcely visible except on close inspection—when I have said all that, I have told about all that I can.

On the runner of gold cloth across the table lay a single book; and I glanced at the book because it seems to be inevitable that every one glances at books which are conspicuously placed. It was curiously bound with a leather-like stuff, unornate and to me not at all attractive; so that it seemed wholly out of place.

It was a German book, full of grotesque engravings, and the last thing in the world that I would have supposed Zoronna Symondi would have in her presence; Holbein's "Dance of Death," if I remember the title accurately. Anyway it was a book of dark, distressing illustrations for any one who loves the vain things of life; and, being a little interested, I began to examine it with some care until just inside of the cover I found a notation in English that caused me to close the book hastily and feel a great urge to wash my hands.

The notation was clipped from a bookseller's catalog, and gave a description of this very copy and in black letters, as if the statement might otherwise escape the attention. It said—

"Bound with human skin."

Though my aversion to the book was strong, yet somehow its presence there gave a peculiar twist to my opinion of Zoronna. The book, or rather its binding and association, was detestable, but her sense of irony in keeping it where it could scarcely escape her eye was almost admirable.

That did more than anything else could possibly have done to make me understand that the woman was bold enough to realize the truth about herself and her mode of life, and that she must have enjoyed rather than inordinately valued the wilfully luxurious trappings with which she surrounded herself.

I have not perhaps made myself clear, for I am unfitted to describe the finer shades of psychology, being a card-gambler and revolver-expert; but to try again: The presence of the ghastly book made me feel that Zoronna had not lost her head through her triumphant notoriety and extreme affectation of esthetic debauchery. The only effect this change of opinion really had was to make me think that she was probably more dangerous than I had suspected; and my original impression of her dangerous quality had been strong.

* * *

ZORONNA returned in twenty or thirty minutes, having changed her brilliant costume for one scarcely less spectacular, though it was of black—solid black from aigret to slippers, unrelieved except for the collar, which I thought was of diamonds, and a large dark-blue enameled belt-buckle. Even the glittering buckles had been removed from her slippers.

I was to learn eventually that the brilliant collar was not of diamonds, but of rhinestones, and that even the stones she wore on her fingers when she reappeared were of paste also. She well knew Hurgronje's mad love for gems. He was an expert in their value.

Those who had intimate relations with him never tempted his cupidity by showing any piece of jewelry with which they did not care to part. He had a greater passion for precious stones than for anything else. Though a "magician," he would engage in any profitable and safe crookedness to make money.

But he spent money, lots of it. He never parted with a gem upon which he had set his fancy, though he was seldom known to go to the expense of honestly purchasing what he wanted. He would spend twice the jewel's value, so I have been told, in laying and putting through plans for stealing it. Gems and an ape, raised from babyhood—very nearly like a human being—were all that he seems really to have regarded with anything like love.

Zoronna's dress, as I have said, was black. It was rather short of skirt and of a flimsy silken black, not nearly so short nor so stiff and bunchy as a ballet dancer's, but with something of that effect.

She seemed preoccupied, and her effort to be gracious was a little labored. This was surprizing in one so accomplished. Flashes of something like fear passed across her eyes, and she was obviously with great resolution holding her courage to the sticking-point.

Once she turned impulsively toward me as if to make a confession. The confession did not come. She checked herself. She was troubled; but also determined, yet a little uneasy. I watched her closely, and with no effort to be agreeable. That may have increased her nervousness. Perhaps I imagined it, but it seemed that she had grown just a little afraid of me. There was no reason to be unless she was meddling with trickery.

She asked me to step into the next room with her and carry in the screen behind which I was to conceal myself. She said that she had sent her maids to bed. She did not want them to know that I was there.

She tried to speak carelessly, but there was much uneasiness in her manner. When she opened the door into the next room she stood aside to let me pass first. Without her noticing, I slipped my foot against the door so that it swung clear open and back to the wall—and in that way I knew no one lurked there. When I approached the screen—a four-panel screen—I had both hands in my side-pockets. But no one was behind it.

I carried the screen where she wished it. It was nearly as tall as a man's head—a lacquered screen, black, inlaid artfully with mother-of-pearl so as to form an ornate design of a monstrous dragon stretching his supple body from a lower corner upward and clear across the four panels in an effort to swallow the moon. At her suggestion one of the slim-legged chairs was put behind the screen for my comfort.

The scenery, so to speak, was in place; and we sat down to wait. It appeared that Hurgronje would be late to his appointment.

Her face was flushed. She frequently clenched her hands. I noticed often that she gave me furtive, appraising glances. But she was trying hard to conceal her uneasiness; she was acting, and did it quite well for one whom I knew to be disturbed.

She talked fluently, gracefully, with a certain lightness, accompanied by gestures and a display of energy, that did much to help me understand why men had lost their heads over her. But I have no ease of conversation, no social flexibility. I am habitually stiff as an Englishman among strangers.

Her vivacity was charming, and I thought it courteous of her to waste it on me; though on the other hand I was not sure but that it was artful of her, and designed to disarm what suspicions I might have.

In the course of conversation the book was mentioned. She said lightly that it was a ghastly thing, but fascinating; that it was a present to her. And I imagined that it came from some poor devil who wished fittingly to commemorate the fool she had no doubt made of him.

The tinkling of a musical little bell cut short a sentence. She exclaimed, "There he is!" and, answering a telephone which I had not noticed on a little stand behind a curtain, said to have the party come right up.

* * *

I SLIPPED behind the screen. I did not know exactly what I would do when Hurgronje came into the same room with me, but I rather thought we would leave together and perhaps go to some spot of my own choosing, where he might sincerely repent—and as sincere repentance always seems to be, too late.

I did not run the risk of peeping as the man came into the room. There would be plenty of time. But I knew at once that it was not Hurgronje by his voice. There was also a certain agitation in her voice; and I could not be sure whether it came from relief or disappointment.

"Ah, Zora—again!" he said familiarly.

His voice was pleasant and cultured as the voices of so many men are when they come out of Italy, for instance.

"But Hurgronje—where is he?"

The man laughed amusedly; and, peeping a bit, I saw him toss hat and gloves carelessly to the floor beside a chair. He was a rather tall, neat, good-looking man, with a lean face and a slight, silken mustache; a very competent fellow in appearance, with much about him suggestive of passion and cruelty. Yet I repeat that he was rather handsome. He seemed in high good humor.

"Hurgronje——"

An expressive gesture filled out the exclamation. She asked what was the trouble and he said that Hurgronje was near to being out of his head.

"Zora, you know about that —— of an Everhard?"

"Yes, yes."

"Supposed to have been put away in Pittsburg. You know?"

"Go on; yes."

"Cigaret?" He extended a case.

"Not yours," she said pleasantly enough, but with a significance that was explained by his laugh and reply that the poppy flavor was wholly harmless.

"As much of a little nun as ever?" he went on jestingly. "Wild, wicked little Zora! You're a great fraud. But Hurgronje couldn't come. He needs a doctor. He needs two doctors. I begin to fear he needs a funeral director. If I had been in New York at the time— What's the matter with you? Nerves gone?"

"With me? It is you. Sit down; and don't wear out my rug walking around," she said.

The fellow was pacing back and forth with an air of familiarity, though he had not approached the screen.

He laughed quietly and sat down. From a drawer in the table Zoronna had removed a box of cigarets and a little tray.

"As I was saying, if Hurgronje hadn't had me out here to line up that Chink— And by the way, Zora, I'm not enthusiastic over that play. Widows and senile millionaires are one sort of people, and Mr. Sin Chang is somebody else, as you know, beautiful nun. Don't you?"

"Oh, your story! I'll scream or something."

"I'm always at your service. And if I had been in New York that infernal tinhorn— A regular card-stealer, Zora. Chuck full of dope when he made that play. No doubt of it, as I told Hurgronje. A man doesn't do stunts like that unless he is full of 'coke.'

"Well, cocain or no cocain, if I had been there, Mr. Self-Styled *Ever*hard would have gone to bed on a marble slab inside of twenty hours."

"It's all over now, isn't it?"

"Is it?" he demanded. "That's the point. Somebody is dead and buried in Pittsburg; but was it Everhard? Hurgronje's wishing he could call up a real spirit to tell him. I am telling him to conjure up that Everhard person and confront those throat-cutters. They're a couple of superstitious niggers. He could scare the truth out of 'em."

"But I thought—" she began.

"So did we all. But this is what happened—or at least I guess so. There was no chance to get into Everhard's room. He was either in it or had somebody in it day and night, until one afternoon when a fellow called Wally Ford was on watch, and Ford telephoned in that Everhard was suddenly heading for Pittsburg and that he was going along—to keep him in sight.

"Hurgronje sent out his two favorite niggers. They couldn't—or say they couldn't—connect up with Ford, but they found Everhard—and you know the rest. They didn't know Ford by sight—that's the trouble with having too big an organization.

"And, Zora, this is good! The niggers got in tonight from Pittsburg. All swelled up—chests out two feet. They planked down the suitcase on the table.

" 'Aw' dem gol' an' jims is dere,' they said.

"Hurgronje's face looked like a rising sun—till he opened it. Rings and things were there, all right, but every stone of value had been plucked out. Hurgronje just about died.

"What happened? Nobody knows. Hurgronje doesn't think the niggers would have come back with that stuff if they were in on the theft of the gems; but I tell him that is just what they might have counted on him thinking. Wally Ford could have put them up to do that.

"And Ford—where is he? He's got his share and is on his way to parts unknown.

"Else this so-called Everhard's put something over on us all. I don't believe that. He's dead and buried."

The surprizing thing was that Zoronna, who had stood motionlessly, seemed unimpressed by what he had said. When he paused, in a rather mechanical voice she asked—

"So Hurgronje isn't coming—tonight—at all?"

"I know you said it was important, Zora, but——"

Swiftly she clutched him and stopped his sentence with something frantically spoken about the gems.

He appeared puzzled, but kept to the first subject.

"You insisted that he show up, but——"

This time she did check him and turned the subject back to the disappearance of the gems.

But I heard enough to know that she had given me a story somewhat untrue. She had tried to get Hurgronje to come.

That was strange. She could scarcely know my identity, I reasoned. Hurgronje seemed still convinced that I was dead. It was indeed strange.

The two of them were now talking of me and the missing gems. I listened closely.

The man whom I had called Remy was capable of putting his head to some very plausible deductions, but he was wrong in being inclined to believe that the thievish Wally had made away with the choicest gems and let the negroes kill Everhard. He was quite enthusiastic over his suggestion to get the truth out of the negroes by scaring them thoroughly.

It was plain enough to me that Wally, having searched my room and found enough to tempt him, had impersonated me and pretended to follow me. This had been done, no doubt, to take suspicion off himself; and toward that end, he had left a trail—supposed to be my own—which the negroes, unfortunately not known to him personally, had been cunning or lucky enough to take up far more rapidly than he had thought possible.

BEFORE Remy was through talking of himself and his ideas, he was checked by noticing that Zoronna was acting as if she were ill and trying not to show it—which was her very artful way of finally turning the subject. No doubt she did feel very nearly ill to know that I had heard so much that she had been powerless to prevent without letting Remy learn that an eavesdropper was in the room. He approached her, and advanced his arm as if to put it shelteringly around her; but she pushed him away with a snappish—

"No."

"Zora!" His surprize seemed genuine.

"It's those cigarets."

"I've smoked a thousand of them with you!"

"But tonight—they are stronger."

Remy stood staring down at her, puzzled at first. Then his face darkened; and accusingly—

"It's that Lord Bob, is it?"

She laughed contemptuously, adding—

"He's not a dope anyway."

Remy's face contracted into an expression of jealousy, and his hand clamped on her shoulder, twisting her toward him. More contemptuously than her own voice had been, he said:

"Not a *dope!* You call *me* that——"

She sprang up, jerking away from him, demanding how he dare touch her.

"If it is Lord Bob or my chauffeur, you, Remy Cantello, can say nothing. I hate men. You know it. All of them. Lord Bob is at least a gentleman——"

Remy laughed, and with something of real amusement.

"A gentleman! By the cross of Christendom, a gentleman! And no *dope*. Zora, you're a fool. That fellow is now a mere gutter-wiper for Sin Chang's Chinamen. A hop-head and a chink hanger-on."

"Why, *I* don't care," she said meaningly, as if she really did not care.

"Zora, here. I don't want to quarrel with you, you little tiger-cat. Here, see what I brought you."

He handed her a small box. Indifferently she took it, opened it, and held the ring at arm's length appraisingly; then, carelessly—

"Think Hurgronje 'll miss it?"

Remy swore petulantly.

"But, Remy," she explained with an air of patience, "he recognized that bracelet you gave me."

"—— him, that was *not* his bracelet. I bought it, I told you. I bought it for you, Zora. He saw it and stole it. And I stole it back."

"Yes, yes. Of course," she admitted with an exasperating manner of unbelief.

"Oh —— you!" he exclaimed with his hands in his hair.

Then accusingly, abruptly:

"You've found some man. I know you."

With hands resting on her hips she eyed him.

"Men—ugh!"

There seemed real contempt, even disgust, in her voice.

"You devil!"

"Oh, Remy," she said wearily, "be original. Every man I know has called me 'You devil.' Sit down and be pleasant. Or go home and let me entertain myself."

"What did you want with Hurgronje?" he asked, pointblank.

"I didn't want Hurgronje. *He* said that he *was* coming. Of course I had to say, 'All right.' "

"But he said you insisted——"

"Remy, stop! You'll drive me mad. Sit down—or go home. That's better. Go on home. It's late. I'm sleepy."

Remy sat down reluctantly, and Zoronna moved to the table and sat on the edge of it.

I thought the table would give way; it seemed so frail. But the men, masterly furniture-makers who fashioned such things a few centuries ago, seem to have used brains instead of chunks of wood for underpinnings.

Remy restlessly glanced about, and his eye lighted and paused on the screen so that at first I thought he had detected my presence at the narrow crack of one of the panelings. But I did not move. It was perhaps just as well for him that he did not by accident chance to reach for a handkerchief, or something in his pocket, at that moment.

She saw the direction in which he was staring and demanded with high petulancy:

"Oh, look at me when I am talking!"

She had not been talking; but women may impudently presume to be unreasonable. It is an inalienable prerogative.

He said something about that screen being a "beauty;" and she called it a piece of "kindling" that she would be glad to have him carry off, if he wanted it.

A few moments of silence followed; then, seriously but reluctantly, he began:

"Zora, you know what we're up against here. Trying to hook up with a Chinaman. Opium, Hurgronje says. It's that big ruby, I'd guess. You know it's dangerous to meddle with Chinamen."

"So I've heard. What's troubling you most now?"

"It's really in the interest of that Chinese deal that you have Lord Bob tied to your ankles, isn't it? You don't care for him; do you, Zora?"

"Why," she demanded with a show of anger, "always Lord Bob? The day I find a man I care more for than that—" she snapped her finger—"I'll tell *you* of him. That isn't a promise, either. It's a threat!"

"Zora——"

He was trying to be patient though his was far from being a patient nature. He asked earnestly, pointedly—

"Zora, are you *sure*, absolutely sure, that Lord Bob isn't that fellow that got us into trouble in Paris?"

Her answer seemed one of justifiable irritation.

"How many times must I tell you he isn't? And don't you suppose that *I* would know? Remy, you are a fool."

"You don't love him; do you, Zora?" The man's question was a threat.

"Oh; love? Love! Ugh!"

"A woman like you, Zora, has to love somebody."

"Lunatic!"

"And the man you love, I will kill!" the volatile dark-featured Remy cried, springing up.

"There's nothing wrong about that," she said with an elaborate pretense of indifference.

"—— you!"

"Wholly superfluous."

He approached her earnestly and began—

"Zora, how much do you trust Hurgronje?"

She shook her head.

"You know what Sin Chang wants. Slave girls and gems. Hurgronje wants to turn opium smuggler as a side-line. Crazy! And you know Hurgronje would give up drops of his precious blood quicker than the smallest ruby and——"

"I wonder what became of those stones—Everhard got."

"Zora, let us get out of all this—go together—away."

He said it pleadingly, reaching to her hand, which rested on the table.

"Again? I have told you that *I* would say so when I was ready to go. And where would we go? You're not afraid of Hurgronje—so you say. I am."

"Zora!"

Quick as a flash, passionately, his arms went about her—and he kissed her full on the lips.

She was instantly alive with fury, and struggled, pushing and clawing. She shoved him off, and in a rage snatched up the "Dance of Death" from the table and flung it at him, angrily calling him names.

With an oath that he would tame her, he rushed; she evaded him, then was caught, and whirling quickly, struggling this way and that, they struck the screen. It reeled and gently I gave it a little shove, so that it fell with a clatter to the floor. Both glanced toward it, and Zora gave a surprized, half-strangled little cry. Mr. Remy Cantello's hands gradually lifted themselves toward the ceiling. He was confronted by a man in an overcoat, with a black soft hat pulled low, and the lower part of the face bound with a broad white handkerchief, and two guns.

I presented an attitude of slightly ironic politeness, which I thought would be in keeping with the character of a gentlemanly burglar. I had slipped on my coat and hat, brought behind the screen to be out of sight, and put on the handkerchief to be prepared for some such emergency. I had not anticipated the overturning of the screen so much as fancied that Remy Cantello's interest in it would bring him closer.

Zoronna perceived at once what I had in mind, and she gave me, or at least I fancied that she did, a frightened, wondering sidelong glance. When I had quite carefully searched Mr. Cantello and appropriated practically everything that I found, including a bejeweled and razor-like stiletto, some papers, a note-book and his pocketbook—and also, because I had a rôle to keep up, I took his watch, tie-pin, and rings—then I yanked down a curtain, and, tearing a strip from the costly fabric, instructed her to tie him up, after which I removed her jeweled collar, rings, and belt-buckle, jamming everything into my pocket as if in great haste. I tied her also, but carefully—that is, not tightly; and, starting up to listen, seemed apprehensive, and pretended as if I feared some one were coming; then I hurried out of the room.

I REALIZED that I was in a rather delicate situation. For all that I knew she might give information to the police and call them down upon Lord Bob's apartment; but after weighing that possibility carefully, I decided that she would do nothing of the kind.

For one thing, it was not likely that she, or even Cantello, would care to attract attention to themselves by the story that I could tell through having listened; for he would not know how long I had been behind the screen; and for another, and more reassuring thing, Zoronna could not very well actually prove that I had been in her apartment without running the risk of having it also proved that she had taken me there.

However, as a slight precaution against either official or unofficial searchers—the last more particularly—as soon as I returned home I put everything, including the jewels in my belt, into a black silken bag. This made a flexible package somewhat smaller than a pint measure; and raising the "floor" of the gas-stove oven in the kitchenet, I crammed and forced the package in so tightly that the black sheet iron was securely replaced. But I kept out Remy Cantello's note-book, which I wished to inspect, for some interesting items had struck my eye.

Presently Zoronna telephoned. It seemed to me that she was trying to be cheerful and intimate, and she said almost gaily—

"I don't know what you think of me——"

The manner of her saying it was an explicit invitation for me to respond by assuring her that I thought she was all right, and though I had not quite understood, nevertheless that I was willing to listen and ready to believe. That manner is the woman's usual way of getting out of difficulty, of hoodwinking, of gulling men.

I said nothing beyond a highly inflectioned, "Yes?" that might mean anything except that I was anxious to be agreeable.

I thought that she was badly frightened. There was nothing just then that tangibly suggested fear, but I was sure that she was highly anxious, if not alarmed. However she tried to sustain her rôle, and with vivacity wasted flattery on me. I had been so quick-witted and resourceful! How she had laughed up her sleeve at the humbled and astonished Remy!

Oh, yes; and she would like to meet me soon and explain. It was all very simple.

"No doubt," I reflected, "it would seem so when she had thought out her explanation."

There was, I know, fear in her voice even as gaily she asked me to keep the trinkets I had taken from her, though they were paste—to keep them as little souvenirs; and if I would call the following morning she would explain why they were paste, and everything—explain everything.

I declined both proposals. I did not, I said, take souvenirs from women; also that if I ever called on her again it would probably be at my own convenience and possibly when I was not expected.

That was not what I should have said. But I had no way of knowing that she would take it as a threat, and I did want to impress upon her emphatically that I was not one of those men who jump like a puppet on a wire at the slightest movement of a woman's finger.

I was suspicious of her, and I can not dissemble with a woman. It is a foolish thing to try to do, ever. They are so much more expert in the art than I can ever be—or any other man can ever be—that it is not wise to try the game.

She had tried to net me artfully with a kind of coquettish lure. I was not to be netted with any such mesh as coquettes use.

And though it was true that I did wish to meet her again, and intended to, perhaps much sooner than she suspected, I was indiscreet to intimate as much. But when one is as irritated as I was, little slips are likely to occur.

I am very cautious, and I plan carefully; I have much patience and I use it. Still I make mistakes, and almost inevitably if a woman is involved.

Instantly she pretended to be angry, though—I was sure—her anger was mostly a disguise to conceal alarm.

"I had thought," she said cuttingly, "that you were a gentleman!"

That is a trite retort ever on the lips of offended woman, and she seems to think it the most humiliating thing she can politely offer. I replied that hers was the mistake in judgment that women had been making with strangers ever since Eve received the devil with courtesy.

I think she gasped. Then with swift anxiety she asked in a desperate and hopeless tone:

"You won't mention what has happened to Lord Bob? Please, please, you won't say a word?"

As politely as I could without saying anything that might gratify her, I replied that I would use my own discretion; and abruptly hung up the receiver.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE PONY EXPRESS

by E. A. Brininstool

ONE of the most unique enterprises ever undertaken in "making time" across the great Western plains country with Uncle Sam's precious mail was the establishment of the Pony Express by the Overland Transportation firm of Russell, Majors & Waddell of St. Joseph, Missouri, which reduced the time of transmitting news across the continent from twenty-one days to ten days. In 1859 there was not a mile of railroad west of the Missouri River, St. Joe being the western terminus of railroad transportation, and between that city and San Francisco there intervened but one city, Salt Lake City, and two thousand miles of wild, uninhabited country infested only by warlike Indians. Through this uninviting region led the trails over which the Pony Express was run.

The riders were men noted for their lithe, wiry physiques and great bravery and coolness in moments of great personal danger and endurance under the most trying circumstances of fatigue. Some portions of the dangerous route had to be covered at the astounding pace of twenty-five miles an hour, the average speed being from fifteen to twenty miles over the entire route. Each rider had a division of from one hundred to one hundred and forty miles, with relays of horses at distances of from twenty to twenty-five miles. The pay was from one hundred to one hundred and twenty-five dollars per month, and the arms of the Pony Express rider were limited to a revolver and knife, in order to keep the weight down to a minimum. The distance daily traveled by the Pony Express was two hundred and fifty miles.

The mail thus carried was limited to twenty pounds in weight; the rate of postage was five dollars per half-ounce, and every letter had to be written on the very thinnest tissue-paper procurable. Needless to say there were no silly love-missives in the Pony Express rider's mail in those days. Only business letters that demanded the fastest possible transit and warranted the immense expense attending their journey, found their way by the Pony Express.

The mail-bags were two leather pouches, impervious to rain, and were sealed and strapped to the rider's saddle before and behind. Inside the pouches, further to protect the contents, the letters and dispatches were wrapped in oiled silk. The pockets themselves were locked and were never opened between St. Joe and Sacramento, the western terminus.

The first trip from St. Joe to Sacramento, 1,966 miles, was made in ten days. Riders started from both the eastern and western terminus at noon of April 3, 1860. In all the six hundred and fifty thousand miles ridden by the Pony Express riders, but one mail was lost, and that an unimportant one.

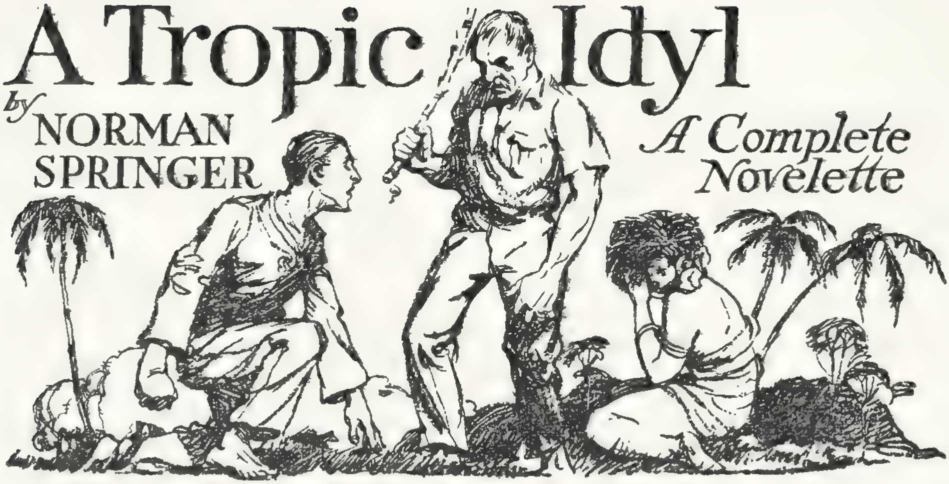
It was far from being a paying venture; the expenses during the two years of its existence being as follows: equipping the line, one hundred thousand dollars; maintenance per month, thirty thousand dollars. Other expenses totaled more than two hundred thousand dollars. The originators of the scheme figured their loss at more than two hundred thousand dollars.

During the last few weeks preceding the termination of the line, occasioned by the opening of the transcontinental telegraph, the riders brought an average of seven hundred letters per week from the Pacific Coast, and the rates were reduced to a dollar a half-ounce. Many of the Pony Express riders were noted scouts, couriers and guides—men who had passed years on the plains among the Indians.

A Tropic Idyl

by NORMAN SPRINGER

A Complete Novelette



Author of "The Luck of Hardluck Karluk," "Donkeyman and Princess," etc.

THE Tropical Trading Company's man on Moorabal Island was dead again. Down in Sydney, old Devine—who was the T-T Co.—looked about for a successor. The old-timers he approached would have nothing to do with the job. They said it was unlucky.

"Three men in three years, Devine! And, besides, there is Stort. No, thank you."

Finally one Alexander Bruce, a clerk in Pitt Street, learned, in his way of business, of Devine's quest. He did not learn of the three men in three years, or of Stort; if he had, being a "newchum," he would have been unimpressed. Alec Bruce applied for the berth, and Devine engaged him on the spot.

In due time the Torres Straits steamer *Alicia*, having steamed half a day out of her course, came to rest upon the brilliant, placid Coral Sea, and landed Bruce and his traps upon the white beach of a tiny bay by means of a whale-boat. Here he was welcomed by a small, inquisitive mob of various colors, all ages and both sexes, which comprised Moorabal's native population, and by a tall, emaciated white man in soiled pajamas, who possessed a slack underlip and a red face that was etched in a singular and startling fashion by a maze of purple veins.

"I'm Stort, the Q-T man," said this last. "Been expecting you for a month. Did you bring any brandy?"

"I'm Bruce, the new T-T agent," replied the newcomer. "No, I didn't."

"Too bad," commented Stort. "My arrack is running low, and the trade-gin makes me all jumpy. Of course you brought a case or two of Scotch?"

"No," said Bruce.

Disagreeable surprize dawned in the Q-T man's face.

"Didn't you bring anything with you?" he demanded.

Bruce did not answer with words. He did not like the question, its tone, or its implication. He did not like the looks of his questioner, his odor, or anything about him. He had a sick feeling inside of him, a feeling akin to horror, when he thought of living for a year in intimacy with this unwholesome companion. So in reply he merely indicated his luggage, a rather imposing pile upon the sand, with a gesture.

Stort looked it over, and grunted disgustedly—

"Newchum!"

Bruce was tired of being "newchummed." On the ship the old-timers had oppressed him with insufferable patronage and stuffed him with horrific and transparent lies about the country. He wanted no more of it.

"Please tell me which house is mine, and how I'm to get my things up from the beach," he said abruptly.

There was a hint of harshness in his voice which had its effect upon Stort. His bony frame stiffened slightly and he gave Bruce a sullen, unfriendly look. Bruce noticed that Stort's eyes were very deep-set, that they held a somber, unquiet light, and that they were terribly bloodshot. Another feature of the man which he disliked.

"Come along; I'll show you around," said Stort. "Your things? The boys will look after them."

He led Bruce up the beach, past high-water and the two go-downs, or sheds, which housed the "trade" of the island, through several hundred yards of blooming tropical garden, and showed him, upon slightly higher and open ground, a verandaed shack with a corrugated-iron roof, which was the Moorabal residence of the T-T agent. He entered with Bruce, and helped himself to the T-T gin, while the other inspected the one room of his new home.

Next he led Bruce to a verandaed shack with a corrugated-iron roof, a hundred yards distant, which was the headquarters in Moorabal of the Queensland Trading Company and the home of Stort, its agent. He pressed Q-T gin upon Bruce and helped himself to the liquor, while Bruce, the untasted draft in his hand, stared round-eyed at the strange-looking creature who squatted in a corner and peered slant-eyed at him.

She was young and comely and light-brown in color, and her only apparel was a bright green cloth that was wound about her and fell from her bosom to her knees. By her color she was half-caste, by her great, spreading bush of hair she was a Torres Straits hybrid and by her presence in the room she was an offense in Alec Bruce's unacclimated eyes.

"That?" said Stort, noticing Bruce's gaze. "That's Marua—my Mary." He leaned forward in his chair and leered unpleasantly at the impassive woman and then at Bruce. There was in his voice the first note of animation Bruce had observed.

"Say—not half-bad, eh?" he demanded of Bruce. "She's one part white and six parts devil, but a looker—what! I won her from Botts, of the pearling fleet, last Melbourne Cup. Yes, sir—four dozen Johnny Walker against the woman, Blue Spec to win! Pretty good, eh?"

"Oh!" commented Bruce.

But there was that in his voice and face which started Stort's pendulous lip to quivering, and caused the sullen light to grow again in his reddened eyes.

"Look here—don't get uppish, young feller!" he exclaimed violently. "We all get Marys up here. It's the custom—see?"

"I meant no offense; why, I said nothing," said Bruce hastily.

"You looked so —— moral," grumbled Stort, his vehemence of voice departing as suddenly as it had come.

He reached for the bottle, discovered it empty and turned upon the girl.

"A fresh one," he said.

Obediently Marua arose and went to a cupboard in the farther corner of the room. Bruce followed her with sympathetic and interested eyes. There was such a golden, velvety sheen to her flesh, she moved with such instinctive, sinuous grace—she was like imprisoned sunlight in this gloomy interior, thought Bruce. She was so obviously a wild thing, a creature of the jungle, like a brilliant bird, or—a brilliant snake.

At the cupboard Marua obtained the liquor, extracted the cork with an expert dispatch that bespoke much practise and brought the bottle to the table. Then she resumed her position on the floor, squatting behind her master's chair in the corner.

Stort's voice interrupted his train of thought, and when he removed his gaze from the girl, Bruce was somewhat startled to discover the Q-T man studying him with narrow-lidded, intense eyes.

"Look here—no poaching!" said Stort. "Marua is my woman; you can't have her—see?"

Bruce felt his cheeks warming.

"I assure you, nothing was farther from my thoughts—" he began.

"Well, I wanted you to know," interrupted Stort. "She's mine, fair, square and above-board, and nobody can take her from me—nobody! And if she looks at you—I'll take it out of her hide!"

BRUCE got angry. There was a savage vindictiveness in the other's voice that affected him like a nauseous draft, and Stort's words were insult. They embarrassed and humiliated him. He stole a pitying glance at the girl; but she apparently was untroubled by her lord's threat, for not a flicker of emotion was visible in her face.

"I don't like that talk!" he told Stort shortly. He got to his feet and turned to the door. "I want some fresh air; I'm going outside," he added.

But not so easily was Bruce shut of Stort. The man was on his heels almost immediately, somewhat boorishly apologetic in manner, and eager, he said, to show Bruce the rest of Moorabal. Bruce was very anxious to be as good friends as possible with his one white neighbor, so he throttled his anger and disgust with his will, and suffered himself to be led about.

There was not much else to see, except the blue water of the sea, which Stort ignored, and the luxuriant jungle, which he dismissed with a wave of his hand and the word "scrub." There was a structure without walls—but possessing the aristocratic corrugated-iron roof—situated in the scented shade of a huge umbrella-tree. This, said Stort, was the traders' dining-room, the place where they, and any white visitors to the island, ate their meals.

It was presided over by one "Charley," a silent, smiling, little brown cripple. Stort explained that Charley was a Manilaman, an ex-pearl-diver, reduced this past few years since the inevitable diver's paralysis had "given him best" to the lowly existence of beach-comber on Moorabal Island.

"Of course, you can do for yourself," said Stort, "but it isn't worth while. Charley is a good cook."

There was, upon the farther side of the little bay, a collection of huts, miserable grass and leaf "gunyahs" for the most part, which housed the mongrel, ambulatory native population.

"They come and go," said Stort. "Some of the time they go with the pearlers, and some of the time they are out on the Barrier after beche-de-mer; but most of the time they just eat and sleep. Rotten lot of nigs!"

Last of all, Stort piloted Bruce to an open grassy glade on the higher ground, a meadow that was fringed with brilliant flame trees and hibiscus and graceful malaleuca, which were alive with darting sunbirds and eyes-aflame, bee-eaters and diamond birds and all the ilk of nectar-lovers. It was the Moorabal cemetery; and not least impressive of Moorabal's sights.

"Why, there seem to be more people under the ground than above it," commented Bruce.

"There are," answered Stort. "But they are nigs, mostly. And not island people. The pearlers run in here to bury their dead, quite often. They never plant them at sea, you know—sharks and alligators! Over there, in the plot by itself, are the white men."

"And are they all pearlers?" Bruce asked.

"Well—some of them," said Stort. "That first one is. That is Martel. His boys got him while he was asleep and his lugger beached on Moorabal Point. His boys would have scoffed him, I dare say, but the rest of the fleet was coming up, so they took to the dingey and made the mainland. They were New Guinea boys, and we heard afterward that the 'abs' got them in the mangrove swamps."

"Oh," said Bruce.

"That next mound—the newest one—is Pierce," continued Stort. "He was the last T-T man before you."

"Why, they told me in Sydney that he disappeared, or something," exclaimed Bruce.

"So he did," replied Stort. "He went balmy—D. T. and fever—and walked into the swamp around the point—and not even the black-boys could trail him. Don't you ever walk into the swamp—alone, and at night. My word, I can't think of it! Poor Pierce, he never came back; but I made the boys dig a grave, because, I say, any white man is entitled to one!"

"I see," said Bruce, giving his companion a curious glance. Stort, he observed, was interested in his subject, and agitated.

"That one next to Pierce—the old one—is Waddy," went on Stort. "He was the first T-T man up here. He did himself, because he got fed up with things. And that one farthest over—the one with the wooden cross—is Carter. I put that cross there—because he was Catholic. He—he went hard!"

Stort's voice ascended in scale and cracked, and he trembled, as if with chill. Bruce was astonished.

"Carter went—oh, terrible hard!" quavered Stort. "My word, it was awful!"

"Why—what—how—" stammered Bruce, conscious himself of an unpleasant thrill.

"Death adder," said Stort. "He was drunk. So was I. We sat on a log. I gave him the bottle, and he dropped it; then he leaned over to pick it up, and the snake bit him in the wrist—the artery. My word—horrible! He howled and rolled, and—and it ran out of his mouth; and then he turned blue."

Stort gazed about him fearfully, and then, lowering his voice to a tremulous whisper, he continued:

"I was sick afterward, and Carter came and talked to me! Say—tell me—do you think he came back?"

The urgent tone and the twitching terror in the other's face gave Bruce a most unpleasant shock.

"I—I don't know," he stammered.

"I think he did," said Stort. "I know he did. He—he still comes back. When I get very drunk."

Bruce essayed a laugh, but it was a very thin and mirthless laugh. His companion's mood made him most uncomfortable.

"Just nerves," he said soothingly. "It's impossible, you know."

"Nerves? Yes, yes; my nerves are all jumpy. I need a drink. Let's get back!"

Stort voiced his need with jerky eagerness and set out with nervous haste for the houses. Apparently Bruce might follow or not, as pleased him.

HE FOLLOWED at a distance, glad to be alone. He wished, as he watched Stort's hurrying back, that he had for company on the island almost any other man in the world. Stort impressed him most disagreeably; the man was a renegade, a sot, a nervous wreck. Bruce disliked him and pitied him, and determined not to see too much of him. Too much of Stort would turn one's stomach.

Bruce went to his own house. He discovered his luggage upon the veranda and a black boy who welcomed him with the stolid announcement—

"Me Billycan, belonga boss fella gone walk about; now Billycan sit down alonga you."

Bruce nodded assent. Being an Australian, he could comprehend the pidgin. Billycan had informed him he had belonged to the unfortunate Pierce; and that he now wished to belong to Bruce. A T-T retainer. Bruce told Billycan they would clean house at once and move in.

It was a task, Bruce discovered, not without excitement of a sort, and that sort not altogether pleasant. Many living things were there before him, in the T-T house—a venomous snake, which Billycan dislodged with a stick from its residence behind the burlap which lined the walls; several lizards; ants in legion, and countless little crawly things; a kangaroo rat that lived under the bed.

There were remarkably few traces of his predecessor in the room; Bruce concluded that Pierce lived light in the tropics, or else his belongings had been collected and sent away. A number of empty liquor bottles, some worn pajamas hanging from pegs, and the musty, moldy bed; these were all that remained of Pierce.

Bruce presented the clothes to Billycan, to that worthy's almost hysterical delight, ordered the doubtful bedding out of the house—a family of scorpions was evicted at the same time—and threw the bottles out of the window. They fell without breaking upon the soft ground and formed an irregular semi-circle about the window. Then, when Billycan had swept the floor with a palm-leaf broom, Bruce moved his luggage indoors and was settled. The evening shadows lengthened, Billycan disappeared, and suddenly Bruce's labors were interrupted by the soft voice of Charley, the beach-comber.

"Come tucker now, boss!"

It was a welcome summons, for he was hungry. He followed Charley's twisted body across the glade to the arbor without delay.

Stort was at table ahead of him and greeted his advent with a surly nod. Stort, it was evident, had been industriously fortifying his shaken nerves with liquid courage—he slumped drunkenly in his chair, and beside his plate was a squat, square-faced bottle of Batavia arrack. Behind his chair Marua sat upon the ground.

Bruce sat down to eat in a spirit of antagonism toward his brother trader. The man, he thought, was a shameless rotter. It was bad enough to know that a white man had a brown woman in his house; but to have this shame frankly visible at meals was quite disgusting. Most disgusting of all was Stort's attitude toward Marua. He flaunted her in Bruce's face, in his glances he gloated over her—yet she was not good enough to sit beside him and must squat at his heels like a dog. Bruce ate his meal, heartily detesting his table-mate.

The supper was well cooked and savory and Bruce's appetite was edged by youth and health and exertion. His enjoyment of the viands was marred only by the sickly-sour smell of the arrack. He tried to ignore the fumes. He wanted to be friends with Stort, even if he could not feel friendly toward him. He endeavored to chat and plied the older man with questions about the island.

Stort declined to chat and gave short and surly answers to the questions. Stort was feeling his nerve tonic. His quarrelsome mood seized upon, the perceptible quivering of Bruce's nostrils over the strange fumes of the potent liquor as an excuse for an outburst.

"You needn't look so squeamish!" exclaimed Stort. "I don't ask you to eat with her, do I? I wouldn't eat with her myself—I'm white! But if I want her behind my chair—that's my affair!"

Bruce promptly said he had not thought of interfering with something that was none of his business.

"You stuck up your nose!" grumbled Stort. "I saw you! Oh, I know—you think you're better than me; you and your morals!"

Bruce kept his temper. The other man was drunk, irresponsible. He stopped trying to make conversation and, leaning back in his chair, gave himself over to reverie and a dreamy contemplation of the witchful tropic evening. He would speak no more.

But after a while Stort grew tired of silence. He ventured a question himself.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded. "You are not the sort Devine sends up here."

Bruce hesitated—and answered. He was compelled to speak. It was an urgent necessity that he talk of a certain person to somebody—to anybody.

He was on Moorabal Island, he told Stort, because of a girl. A girl named Mazie, who lived in Paramatta, down Sydney side. An altogether wonderful girl, whom he intended to marry. A year on Moorabal meant three hundred pounds, nearly, all clear—just enough to set them going nicely. Devine had promised him a good berth in Sydney if he stayed out the year on the island. Wasn't the prospect worth the exile? Mazie and security—for a year on the island?

STORT sipped his drink and listened and smiled cynically, But he was interested. Woman was his favorite topic. When Bruce had quite unbosomed himself, Stort began to talk. He spoke of women as he knew them. He told tales of the sex—tales born in the boozing-kens of the north coast and retailed on island beaches. It was ugly talk. To Bruce it was profanation, insult, to have such talk follow upon his voicing of Mazie's name. This time he could not suppress his resentmnet.

"Shut up!" he cried sharply and suddenly. "My word, you are beastly! If you talked like that in a pub in Sydney, they'd kick you out!"

Stort got upon his swaying, rickety legs and replied with incoherent obscenities. His gaunt body shook with passion; his cavernous eyes were aflame with hatred. He reviled Bruce until he was out of breath. Then he hugged his arrack to his breast, and lurched away to his shack. The brown girl arose and silently followed after him.

Bruce went to his own hut and sat down to write a letter to Mazie. It was his first letter from Moorabal to the girl in Paramatta and it would be dispatched weeks later, when the T-T steamer called at the island for trade. He wrote according to agreement with the girl, in a large, black-covered journal—of which he had a score in his luggage—for the lovers had decided that their daily letters be diaries, to be exchanged as opportunity offered.

He wrote with untruthful cheerfulness, saying Moorabal was a nice place. He wrote no word of Stort or Marua; the names, he felt, would soil the pages for his Mazie's eyes. He concluded veraciously with the complaint that he was lonely, lonely!

Yet when he was finished he did not feel so lonely. His outpouring had cleansed him of his rancor and disappointment. He forgot Stort. He went outside and searched the brilliant night sky until he located, above the horizon, the blazing Southern Cross. This, too, was according to agreement. Mazie had thought of it the last evening they were together; Bruce, half-ashamed and wholly delighted with the fond sentiment of the proposal, gave consent. While they were separated, decreed Mazie, each would, before bedtime, contemplate the *Crux* and think of the other to the exclusion of all things in the world.

Bruce stood in the doorway and there was nothing before him but the stars and Mazie. For a moment he seemed to achieve the communion. The scented air filled his lungs and was wine in his veins; the world played music to his mood—the gentle, dreamy stir and swish of foliage, the bass grumble of the distant sea-surf, the soft purr of the waters of the bay as they lapped the beach—all these combined in wonderful rhythm and harmony. His Mazie was distant uncounted leagues, but never before had Bruce, the lover, felt so near to her.

Abruptly upon his enchanted senses fell Stort's voice, coming from Stort's hut in an angry, drunken scream. The first harsh note dissolved the spell. Bruce restrained an angry oath and turned to go indoors. He heard Marua's voice in pained and pleading cries. The uproar ceased as suddenly as it had started.

Bruce stood staring at the light in Stort's window for some time. Then he shrugged his shoulders and tried to slough the incident from his memory. He was for star-gazing again.

But it was impossible to regain the pedestal. His feet remained upon the ground, his mind could not shut out the hut across the way. Finally he gave up the attempt, and went inside, shutting the door behind him with quite unnecessary violence. Neither did this act shut out the thought of Stort.

"The beastly rotter!" he growled. "He was beating her!"

II

IT WAS suffocatingly hot in the narrow shade of the go-down. The heat radiating from the corrugated-iron wall cut through Bruce's sweat-soaked pajamas and blistered his back. But he did not move to the more endurable heat beneath a shade tree. He was hardly conscious of the discomfort, for his attention was centered upon a black smoke-smudge that trailed above the distant rim of the sea.

It was the final good-by of the *Island Queen*, the little T-T steamer, bound down the coast to other trading-stations and to Sydney. Yesterday the *Island Queen* had entered the bay, tied up to the rickety wharf and gutted his store-house of its copra and shell and trepang. At dawn, this morning, she had sailed, bidding farewell to lonely Moorabal with much derisive hooting of her whistle.

The lazy wisp of smoke at which Bruce gazed was the last visible connecting-link between him and the outside world; and even as he gazed, it dissipated. Not for three months would another steamer call at Moorabal and bring him written word from Mazie.

The *Island Queen* had brought him word. He had the word with him at the moment, in the shape of a black-backed journal—in all respects save its contents similar to the one he had dispatched south—which he hugged beneath his arm. Nearly all of last night Bruce had sat up, reading Mazie's letters and dreaming; today he expected to re-read and re-dream.

Indeed, he was dreaming now, and the heat and sight and smell of Moorabal were shut away from him. He was dreaming that the great day of his release had arrived and he was sailing south on the *Island Queen*. Almost was the sound of Moorabal shut out of his mind.

There were certain sounds of Moorabal he could not shut out. They persisted in his consciousness, and spoiled the architecture of his air castles. All last night these sounds had disturbed and incensed him; this morning they still broke against his ears and muddied his thoughts. They were the sounds of revelry, raucous and alcoholic, a discordant medley of hooting laughs, obscene shouts and bawled ditties. For the *Island Queen* had also brought Stort a message from the outer world—a case of whisky; and in company with his thirsty, flabby friend of the lugger, he was on spree.

The pair were, at the moment, on board the graceful little pearling-lugger, which was moored at the Q-T go-down but a short distance from his own wharf. Bruce could see them sprawled on the after deck, beneath the awning, with a native boy administering to their thirst. Stort was stretched full length upon the deck, a gaunt, corpse-like figure, but Roper sat with his back against the sky-light, his gross body seeming to crowd the tiny poop—and each proved the fiery life within him by howling, in wretched key and out of unison, the music-hall ditty the boatswain of the *Island Queen* had last night sung for them.

Bruce searched the deck for sight of Marua, but the girl was not there; and he would have been surprized had she been, for his two months' residence on Moorabal had informed him of Stort's jealous regard for the brown girl. When white men of the pearling fraternity came to visit the island, Marua, as Charley, the beach-comber phrased it, "went sit down along o' gins" in the native village, or else kept secluded within her own hut.

Bruce's relations with his brother trader had not improved with the passage of time. He could not bring himself to be friends with Stort, even though the latter, in his more lucid and arid moments, was pitifully eager for his companionship. But Stort could think of nothing save drink and women, and his handling of these subjects in conversation always bored and angered Bruce.

There had been so far no repetition of the quarrel of the first evening; but their tempers ever simmered on the verge of outbreak. They lived in a state of truce; they passed the time of day, ate together and were carefully civil to each other. Stort had made a few attempts, during the first couple of weeks, to loaf and chum with Bruce. Bruce repulsed the overtures as tactfully as he could. Thereafter the men peaceably and cordially hated each other.

Bruce knew why Stort hated him. After the first night, he could hardly avoid knowing. Stort hated him for Marua's sake. The Q-T man was mad about his brown woman and lived in constant dread of losing her to another man. His passion for Marua was abnormal; so was his jealousy of her.

His love—if so unwholesome a feeling could be termed love—manifested itself in ugly cruelty; he humiliated her in public, and, as Bruce well knew, beat her in private; and did a strange man's eyes fall upon her, Stort was filled with rage and terror. Stort hated Bruce because Bruce was younger, cleaner, more to be desired by a woman; and because Marua's eyes followed Bruce as he moved about Moorabal.

Marua's eyes had come to be not the least of Bruce's trials on the island of Moorabal. They were the large, liquid eyes of dark people and they regarded him expectantly. A query lurked in their soft, black depths. He passed a large portion of his waking hours conscious that Marua's eyes were upon him.

If he were working in the go-down, he might look up and see her in the distance, standing in the blazing sunshine like a golden-green statue, staring in his direction; if he passed Stort's hut, he would feel her gaze upon his back; when he sat in his own house, writing in the black book to Mazie, he might glance up and see the soft, pleading eyes regarding him through the window; at meals, Marua, squatting behind Stort's chair, looked at him steadily and hopefully, with a grave and compelling insistence, until her master, sensing Bruce's discomfort and its cause, turned to her— then her gaze dropped modestly to her brown, spreading toes.

Marua's eyes began to get upon Bruce's nerves. More than once, as he slept and dreamed, the haunting eyes of the brown girl visited his pillow, where only the frank, blue eyes of his distant sweetheart had a right to stop. More and more often, in his days, as he day-dreamed away the slow, idle hours, the picture of Mazie he held in his mind's eye would imperceptibly dissolve into Marua's image.

They were hard to endure, these leaden, slothful, Moorabal days. About once a week—rarely twice a week—a plantation cutter with copra from up the coast, or a beach-comber's dingey with trepang from the Barrier Reef, or a pearling lugger with shell, would arrive and moor to the T-T wharf. Then Bruce had a few hours welcome work, superintending the removal of the cargoes to the go-down and signing vouchers to be honored by the T-T agents at Thursday Island, or Rockhampton. The rest of the time he had nothing to do save write to Mazie and think. He thought mostly about love.

IT IS not well for a young man to think about love when he is marooned in a land where nature assails his every sense with wanton, riotous excess of life. Love could not be pale and timid on Moorabal nor strait-jacketed by reflection. The air of Moorabal was rich with the heavy, passionate scents of tropic gardens and Bruce breathed its fire into his veins.

Bruce would not willingly think of any woman save Mazie. But Marua was young and good to look at and near by: moreover, her condition as Stort's woman was wretched and pitiful in the extreme. Only a heart of stone could have met her gaze untroubled—and Bruce had not a heart of stone.

He told himself he pitied the brown girl. Being an honest youth and wholly given to his betrothed, he wrote pages about Marua in the black book. Then, reflecting, he tore out the pages, because he felt that Mazie could not understand, and, in any case, it was not good that so evil a matter be brought to her attention.

Pitying Marua, Bruce was very careful to be kind to her on the occasions of their meetings. These occasions were rare and their intercourse confined merely to salutations. Marua never showed the least inclination to linger and gossip; indeed, she always seemed eager to hurry on her way.

He smiled when he spoke to her. She smiled when she replied—in surprizingly good pidgin—and Bruce thought the smile enlivened her handsome, expressionless face most attractively. But it was a wistful, questioning smile, a companion to her gaze; she was, Bruce told himself impatiently, a human question-mark, directed at him.

What did she want? What was he expected to do? Bruce was sufficiently piqued by the girl's manner to wonder and sufficiently loyal to Mazie to avoid any act that would hint, even to himself, that he was unduly interested in the brown girl. He assured himself he was not. But he wondered why she did not seek him out during his frequent rambles in the uninhabited jungle depths of the island, and tell him what she wanted of him.

He knew she sometimes left Stort in drunken sleep and followed him on his solitary walks. Billycan and Charley both informed him of this fact; and once or twice he had caught a glimpse of her green sarong and a flash of her golden skin in the scrub near by. More than once or twice he felt her presence, had the sense of her eyes upon him, as he traversed the twilight aisles of the thick forest or idled across the grassy meadows on the upland.

The espionage was uncanny and got upon his nerves. He would not willingly think of any woman save Mazie—but he could not help thinking a great deal about Marua.

HE WAS thinking about Marua now, as he stood before his go-down, staring across the blue water of the bay at Roper's lugger. He was wondering where Marua was, and if he should see her that day. For he planned to journey to a little scented arbor he knew of in the deep jungle, a place where the bower-birds came to dance and make love, and there pass delightful hours in a reperusal of the black book under his arm.

He wondered if Marua would follow him there. He hoped she would not; he told himself he wanted no woman save Mazie to know that ground. But he rather thought Marua would follow him, because with Stort on spree with the pearler she would have the chance to escape her master's eyes.

Bruce suddenly wished he himself had taken his chance to escape the eyes of the bibulous but wakeful Captain Roper. It was too late now. Roper was calling to him and beckoning him on board; and Stort hoisted himself on his elbow and mingled his unpleasant, shrill laugh with the mariner's bellow.

"You Sydney burgoo-eater—let's 'ave a look at you!" was Roper's hail.

His words were offensive, but Bruce knew his intention was not. He was offering hospitality. Bruce sighed and moved toward the Q-T wharf. As agent, he could not behave churlishly toward "Bully" Roper, for Roper's trade might come his way some day. He decided he would have one drink, no more, with Stort and the lugger's captain; then he would plead work to be done, and escape to the scrub and Mazie.

Once beneath the awning of the poop and seated upon the diver-bitts, Bruce found himself the object of boisterous and good-natured abuse.

"My word, but you're the blurry toff!" exclaimed Roper. "Here you 'ad me up to your shanty yesterday, and filled me full of good liquor, but you're too blasted proud to come aboard and 'ave a wet or two with me, out o' my own stock. That's not the way, me lad, to treat a white man in this country!"

Bruce made his excuse, a good one, that the arrival and dispatch of the *Island Queen* had prevented his being as friendly as he would have liked during Roper's visit.

"He, friendly?" exclaimed Stort, with drunken frankness. "He can't be friends with the likes of us, Roper. He's too good."

"I don't blame him for keeping shy of you," Roper retorted with equal outspokenness. "My word, you make a man creepy! I wouldn't drink with you—or give you my trade either—if I didn't owe the Q-T money! But Bruce will be friends with me—won't you, lad? Hey, Tuckerbag, hop alonga top-side plenty quick, or you catch him plenty trouble, my word!"

The stentorian threat caused a bushy head to pop out of the cuddy and Tuckerbag, a young Cape York aboriginal, hoisted his lank, sooty body out on deck. Tuckerbag carried a bottle in his hand from which the cork had been freshly extracted; and, obeying Roper's gesture, he handed it to Bruce.

"Tip her up; I never bother with glasses," urged Roper.

Bruce carefully laid his black book upon the deck by his feet and proceeded to "tip her up." Such a drink in such weather was actually nauseous to him, so he plugged the bottle's neck with his tongue and permitted but a thin trickle of the smoky, fiery Scotch to enter his throat. When a decent interval was passed, he lowered the bottle and passed it to the waiting mariner, with a shudder and sigh that might have been of enjoyment, but wasn't.

"I hope you have a lucky trip, Captain Roper," he said, rising. "Are you sailing tonight?"

"Maybe; maybe not," was the answer. "But—what the blurry, lad!—you're not going ashore now? Stay and get drunk with us!"

"He doesn't get drunk. I told you he was too good," interjected Stort.

" 'E doesn't get drunk? My word, what do you do with yourself in this blasted 'ole?" exclaimed Roper with blank surprize.

"He's moral," drawled Stort. "He walks around the scrub and picks posies and dreams of the girl he left behind him."

The pearler laughed and winked at Bruce in a comradely fashion. He was flabbily fat, and his skin was the hue of dough; as unwholesome-looking a man, after his fashion, as was Stort. But there was a rugged good nature about Roper that was rather likable, and Bruce, even in his hot anger, recognized that Roper wished not to offend.

"Oh, well, the lad's wiser than we two guzzlers," was Roper's response. "He's likely to live a while in these latitudes, if that is his pace. Flowers and dreams—my word, I mind when I 'ad the same feelings. I'll not keep you, lad—if that's where you're bound. And here's luck to you."

"Just listen to this—it's rich!" broke in Stort suddenly.

Bruce glanced down at the speaker. To his horrified amazement, he saw the black book, Mazie's book, opened, in Stort's bony hands; and Stort was grimacing and chuckling over the page that met his eye.

" 'I saw your face in the sky last night when I looked at the Cross,' " Stort read, " 'and it was almost as if your strong, tender, smiling self were by my side——' "

He got no farther, for the book was snatched from his grasp, and Bruce's furious fingers were at his throat. The latter's rage was lethal. He jerked his victim erect, and squeezed the scrawny throat and shook the bony frame until the body sagged limply. Undoubtedly he would have been Stort's death, on the spot, for Stort's potations had rendered him quite helpless to defend himself and Bruce's anger made him quite blind to the portent of the swelling purple veins in the hated face before him; but Roper intervened and his measured, unexcited words shocked reason into Bruce.

"Better stop now, lad, or 'e'll pop a vein," said Roper. "Unless you really want to finish him off. I'll not say anything, if you do."

Bruce released his grip upon the other's throat abruptly, and Stort collapsed upon the deck, speechless and but half-conscious. Bruce, breathing heavily himself, picked up the book, and started for the wharf.

"He's no end a rotter," was Roper's parting comment. "If it wasn't I owe his blasted company my bloomin' soul, I'd 'ave lent you a hand, though you didn't no-way need it. My word, he fair turns my stomach, 'e's such a beast!"

III

BRUCE'S revulsion to the ugly brawl carried him hot-foot away from the beach, nor did he pause for breath or reflection until he had passed his house and the cemetery and arrived at the foot of the long, thickly forested slope which ranged upward to the rocky backbone of the island. But now his physical distress was stronger than the whirl of indignant and resentful thoughts that flogged him onward. He sat down beneath a tree and fell to fanning himself with his broad-brimmed hat.

He was very tired. The unwonted briskness of the headlong walk from the beach, beneath the blazing, tropic sun, had sweated him of his strength. His clothes stuck to his body; yet his flesh felt dry and afire. The quarrel had left his nerves a-jangle, and he was even a little nauseous. Yet he was determined, as soon as his heart ceased its pounding and he could breathe easily again, to push on into the deep jungle, to seek that secret retreat of the birds and there shut out from his mind the memory of Stort and Stort's world, and live the day with Mazie.

He knew he was ill-attired for jungle rambling. Always, before, he wore stout, legginged khaki when venturing into the thick forest. Today his covering was the flimsy pajamas, fit dress for the veranda and the beach but ill-suited to the scrub, where a myriad barbs and needles assaulted the passer-by. But to clothe himself for tramping meant a return to his house, and that meant a return to the sight and sound of the drunken revelers on the lugger. He would brave the jungle naked first.

His skin was afire; so was his blood; and heated, fantastic thoughts swirled in his mind. He craved the shade and the cold. He felt reckless and light-headed, as if he had drunk wine; Stort was behind him, a disappearing memory, and before him, in the dim, vaulted heart of the jungle, was peace—and Mazie. Hugging the black book to his bosom, Bruce hurried through a grove of giant gum-trees and plunged into one of the narrow, sinuous aisles that pierced through the world of tangled living green.

He walked in twilight, upon a black mold that was the jungle's cemetery and reservoir of life as well. The sun was shut out of this scrub-land and the daylight, filtering downward through scores upon scores of feet of interlaced foliage, was awesomely and mysteriously dim, as in the vaulted interior of a great cathedral. The wind was shut out as well, and the air about him was breathless and steamy and compounded of strange, strong odors.

At times the track before him was covered with a light, mephitic mist; it hugged the ground like a scummy film and retreated as he advanced, beckoning him onward like some poisonous will-o'-the-wisp. At times the parasite flowers were so thick about him, and the festoons of their vines hung so low from the trees, that he had to bend nearly double to pass by; and when he did so, the stupefying sweetness of the breath of the pale, bewitching flowers commingled with the rank exhalations of the ground to make a draft so strong and noxious his lungs refused it, and he crept coughing and choking on his way.

He pushed on, heedless and unresting, driven by the fantasies of his excited mind. The barbs of swinging vines ripped his garments and raked his flesh. A skirmishing battalion of inch-long soldier ants disputed the path with him. He trampled over them, indifferent to the cruel stings. Such pain was impotent to arrest him; for already, in his veins, was a deadlier poison than the ants carried, a hotter fire than the smart of a scratched back.

As he won the higher ground, the jungle thinned and the daylight became stronger. Even here and there a sun-shaft pierced the green canopy. He began to see birds as well as hear them. He began to taste clean air again. He came to a spring of pure, cold water that gushed out of a cleft rock in the hillside and was immediately soaked up by the spongy soil; and here he paused and slaked his urgent thirst.

This was the spring of the bower-birds, and when he passed over the ridge of the little hill he was in the bower-birds' grove. It was an oasis of sunshine and clean air in the desert of green, a garden spot, an open forest of graceful trees some two acres in area, and walled in by the dense jungle. Bruce hurried over the springy, flowered turf to the heart of the grove, a little glade ringed and shaded by stately malaleuca and snow-white "paper-barks" and blossoming hibiscus. Here he lay down upon the ground and rested.

He might have been in fairyland, so beautiful were his surroundings, so fragrant seemed the smells, after the rank gloom of the jungle. He looked up through the leaves at an immense and fathomless sky. Birds of brilliant plumage darted hither and thither across his range of vision or perched on the branches and peered down at him. A ghost of a sea-breeze fanned his burning cheeks and gave him the scent of the near-by blossom-nectar and the faint breath of sandalwood. It was a drowsy hour; the whispering trees joined with the droning bees to make a lullaby that Bruce found irresistible.

He had come to this secluded spot to read the black book, but now he was here he discovered himself incapable of the effort. It was not that he was too wearied; but a lethargy took possession of him, and with it he experienced a singular feeling of lightness. It was as if his body left the ground and floated on the air. His gaze plumbed deeper into heaven than ever before. His mind was alert and seemed endowed with uncanny and erratic insight.

He looked for Mazie and found her all about him. His couch was her soft bosom, the tree that shaded him was her stooping form, her eyes were the sky, her breath was the sweet-tasting breeze. All nature was his beloved, and he saw her each moment in new guise. She sat beside him and ran her soft fingers through his hair. She sang to him, and her voice was the murmur of leaves and the trills of song-birds. She laughed at him, and with him. She was everywhere, and for no two moments was she the same.

Now she was a demure and winsome lass in a starched white frock, which rustled as she moved and suggested a sane, ordered existence amid houses and streets; abruptly she changed to an alluring, mysterious woman, enveloped in vaporous draperies through which her white form shone dimly, who flitted about beneath the trees, disappearing, reappearing, beckoning him to arise and follow her. Once she came and leaned over him so close he might have met her lips with his had he possessed the power to lift his head a little.

As she changed form, so did she change color. One moment her hair was golden, and, as she ran, streamed behind her like a bright torch; the next moment it was a thick black mop, which stood out from her head for a foot or more. Her eyes were blue and frank; but even as he looked into them they changed to deepest black, and their candor was replaced by an enigmatical, questioning expression he found most disturbing. Her white skin became before his eyes a brown skin, a brown that glistened like golden velvet in the sunlight. Her ghostly draperies became a green sarong. Mazie merged into Marua.

The transformation was so complete and so surprizing that Bruce mastered the strange sloth which held his body, and hoisted himself on an elbow, the better to observe the woman. There was still a sane cell functioning in the back of his mind, and he realized dimly that some unhealthiness flooded his veins and dizzied his brain and tricked his eyes with illusions. But Marua seemed no fantasy. She stood so close he might almost touch her with his hand, and he could see her bosom rise and fall as she breathed. Yet she could not be flesh and blood, for Mazie was inside of her! It was very interesting and amusing, and Bruce smiled.

It seemed this smile was what Marua awaited. She laughed joyously in rejoinder and danced away from him. Bruce saw she had a garland of crimson hibiscus entwined in her hair, its long ends trailing behind her as she moved.

At the farther end of the glade she paused, and smiling, looked at him. She stood before one of the little roofed pavilions the bower-birds so cunningly builded and gaily decorated for their mating dances; it seemed she stood there purposely, for she drew his attention to the birds' love-bower with a gesture. When she saw he understood she commenced to dance.

Up and down the glade she moved, leaping, strutting, posturing, swaying, preening her imaginary feathers and spreading them to the sun, dancing in rhythm, attuned to some wild jungle music she alone could hear. She passed to and fro before the recumbent man, advancing, retreating, each movement of her supple form a picture of savage, sinuous grace. The wonted gravity was gone from her face; she laughed and her eyes were glad.

Watching that mad dance, Bruce was infected by it. It got beneath his skin, his pulse throbbed to the measure, and his languor was routed. He sought to arise and join in the dance. He did get to his feet, but at his first step shooting lights appeared before his eyes and blinded him, and he stumbled and fell. When he looked up from the ground Marua had stopped her dance and was looking at him with a concerned face.

Also, Stort was there, standing behind Marua, regarding her with an enraged glare and menacing her with a barbed stick of lawyer-cane.

Stort spoke to the girl, or else she sensed his presence, for she glanced behind her, startled; and seeing her master, she cried out in alarm and terror and shrank away before him. Then Stort leaped upon her and beat her upon the bare shoulders with the cruel staff.

IT WAS the brutality of the assault that gave strength to Bruce's body and singleness of purpose to his addled wits. Stort's face was a fiendish mask, and Marua's flesh was torn and bleeding from the spikes of the weapon Stort wielded; his cries were screamed curses; hers, of pain and fright. Bruce was maddened by the sight and the sounds.

It was not only Marua who was being beaten; Mazie, as well, received the blows—for had not the two become one before his eyes? It seemed to Bruce that the strength and fury of a typhoon entered his body and he had no other object in life than to kill Stort.

He staggered to his feet and fell upon Stort with his fists. His onslaught was so sudden Stort was taken unawares; and in any event his wasted frame was no match against the youth's stout body. Bruce's initial unaimed blow sent him reeling a dozen feet, to be saved from falling by striking against a tree. An instant later Bruce had Stort's neck between his hands and was squeezing and shaking in excess of fury.

Stort cried out while he had breath left. He said:

"She's mine! She's mine!"

And Bruce took up the refrain and chanted:

"She's mine! Mine! Mine!"

When Stort was limp and no longer struggled, Bruce cast him away, and he fell upon the ground and was still. Bruce thought he had killed him, and was glad. He found Marua at his elbow; she too was glad, radiant, and her eyes were no longer questioning. They were trustful and submissive. There was in them, too, the light of proud possession.

But Bruce had the sense of great loss. He stared wonderingly at his empty hands and into the girl's transfigured face, but his hot, smarting eyes did not find what they sought. Mazie was gone, quite gone.

"Where is she?" he demanded. "Where, where?"

Smiling, Marua answered softly—

"Marua your Mary now."

She spat in the direction of Stort's prostrate form.

"Marua sit down alonga T-T house," she added.

Then she abased herself. She dropped to her knees and rubbed her forehead upon one of Bruce's shoes.

But to the latter, at that moment, the act had no significance, for his mind was wandering afar from the girl. His eyes had fallen upon the black book, which lay upon the ground some distance away; and Mazie was in that book. He broke away from the brown girl and went lurching across the glade; and when he picked up the book and hugged it to his breast, a great contentment filled him.

Marua followed him and laid a detaining hand upon his arm.

"You plenty sick, my word!" she told him. "You walk about one fella, plenty quick finish; you walk about with Marua, plenty quick make home!"

Bruce was too blissful to listen or try to comprehend. But one word of Marua's speech stuck in his mind; the word "home." He decided instantly he must carry Mazie's book home. But not in Marua's company; she might filch it from him. He roughly shook off the girl's hand and plunged alone into the jungle path.

IV

"YOU'VE been blurry bad, lad; my oath, you 'ave!" said Roper.

Bruce smiled up from his pillow, but his smile was a question and a puzzled frown contracted his eyebrows.

"What—what happened?" he inquired; and he was astonished at the thinness of his voice.

"Fever," said Roper. "You've been balmy for a week with as proper a case o' backwater as I've ever clapped eyes upon between 'ere and Woodlark. I says to myself it would give you best sure, and was all prepared to plant you up on the hill; and so I would have planted you, if it 'adn't been for your Mary. My word, that girl is a proper jewel! 'Twas she as pulled you through, lad."

"But—I don't understand," complained Bruce.

"Maybe you don't," conceded the pearler. "And maybe you 'ad better not try to understand any more today. Because you're a pretty sick man yet, m'lad; for while you're not being out of your 'ead shows that the worst is past, the red color o' your ears, this very minute, shows you still got the bugs in your system and you mustn't excite yourself. Now you just close your eyes for a nap, and when you open them again the Mary will be here with a bit o' broth for you. She's over to Charley's place now, getting it ready. She said as 'ow you'd wake up sensible today; though how she could tell is more than I know. But these nigs understand the fever in a way we don't."

But Bruce would not be put off. He did not feel sleepy, and there were things he desired to know. His presence in bed and his surprizing bodily weakness he could easily comprehend, once he had the clue of "fever." He had been expecting his first bout with the plague of the island. But he had not expected backwater—that was serious—nor that Bully Roper would be his nurse. And what did Roper mean by his repeated allusions to "the Mary?"

A host of shadowy memories—dim and unconnected, like dream memories—besieged his mind. He knew he had gone into the jungle that morning, or yesterday—or a week ago, according to Roper—and there things had happened to him. Just what things, he did not know, but he had a vague sense they were things that concerned Mazie and Stort and Stort's brown woman.

He opened his eyes and asked—

"How did I get out of the scrub?"

Roper was startled by the sudden query.

"My word, I thought you were dead-O," he exclaimed. " 'Ow did you get 'ome? Well, you'll have to ask your lass about that. All I know is I was sitting on your veranda here, waiting for you, and up runs your black-boy, Billycan, very excited and happy, and tells me that his 'boss fella walk about alonga other boss fella's gin' and that his 'boss fella plenty sick, bimeby die.'

"Well, I'd come up here just to give you a bit o' warning against that snake, Stort, who, I knew, was eager to give you best on the girl's account, and when I heard what the boy 'ad to say, I was sure Stort 'ad eased a knife into your back or something like that. But before I could get out o' my chair, the Mary 'ove in sight, with you riding pick-a-back and beating her over the 'ead with a big black book. Balmy as a loon, you were, and fair wild, and singing 'igh and 'ard about the miner o' Bendigo.

"When I went to lend the lass a 'and, you swore I was your girl in white, s'elp me! and you would 'ave made love to me something scandalous, only you couldn't stand without falling. Yes, your Mary brought you out, and a cruel job you gave her, from the way she was bashed about. Aye, and you're lucky to be lying there listening to me, for of all the newchum tricks that's about the best—diving into that fever-trap in the heat o' day, and in pajamas, too!"

"I have no Mary," Bruce protested. "You mean Marua—Stort's woman?"

"Aye, the lass you took away from Stort," said Roper.

Bruce was exasperated and a little excited. With great effort he lifted himself on an elbow and reasserted, with what emphasis he could muster, that he had no Mary and that he had not taken Marua away from Stort. Nothing of the kind!

Roper placed his big paw upon the other's shoulder, and gently pressed him backward until his head was again upon the pillow.

"Yes, yes; of course she isn't your girl," he conceded soothingly. "My mistake, maybe. But 'ow could I think otherwise, with Marua saying she was your Mary, and Stort admitting you looted her and raising —— about it all over the blinkin' island? Fair wild, Stort is. But never you mind, now; you just lie back there and 'ave a bit o' snooze."

"I don't want to sleep!" exclaimed Bruce. "I want to talk; I want to know what is wrong! What are you doing here, anyway? I thought you were sailing yesterday—I mean, the day I got sick."

The pearler regarded him sharply for an instant, and then sighed and surrendered.

"If you won't snooze you won't," he commented, "and I suppose I 'ad better talk to keep you from fretting. When the lass gets back she'll take you in 'and; a bossy little baggage, my word!

"You want to know why I'm sitting 'ere in this chair, with my crew eating their 'eads off in Moorabal Bay, instead of my being half-way to Thursday Island waters, as I intended? Well, now, what would you 'ave 'ad me do, m'lad? 'Ere was you, a white man, bad sick; 'ere was me, a white man, well and 'earty; and 'ere was the only other white man on the island going about with a bashed-in face, and black murder in his 'eart. Would you 'ave 'ad me sail away and leave you to Stort's care, when I knew 'e was just itching to give you best with anything from a rifle-ball to a nigger's waddy, Stort's gone balmy, I tell you, on account o' losing Marua to you!"

"But Marua isn't my woman!" cried Bruce helplessly.

Roper nodded.

"Maybe not; but she thinks she is, and Stort thinks so, too. I suppose maybe you were out of your 'ead all the time you were in the scrub that day, and don't remember what 'appened?"

"Nothing happened; that is, nothing like that," declared Bruce. "I remember—oh, it is all hazy and unconnected, like a dream—but I was in the bower-birds' glade—and Marua came—and Stort—and I think there was trouble—but it wasn't over my stealing

Marua from him. It couldn't have been! Why, I shouldn't dream of taking up with a brown woman! And Marua—why, I haven't exchanged a dozen words with her since I've been on the island, and I couldn't make love to her under any circumstances, because—well, because there is a girl waiting for me down in Sydney."

"I see 'ow it is," said Roper, nodding sagely. "You didn't understand how Marua would think and feel about things, because you 'aven't been in these latitudes very long. Natural for a newchum to make a mistake. But there isn't any doubt you did take her away from Stort—she says so, and Stort admits it."

"But I didn't!" exclaimed Bruce angrily. "My word, Roper, I wish you would get that thought out of your head. It makes me feel—unclean. Of course, I have felt sorry for Marua—who wouldn't, with that beast knocking her about the way he does? But as for making love to her——"

"I didn't say you 'ad made love to her," Roper interrupted. "I know very well you didn't. The lass isn't that sort, or she never would have stuck to Stort, with almost any man in the pearling-fleet willing to take her on. She's a decent little body, according to her lights—which lights are New Guinea lights, you understand, and not your lights or my lights. You didn't make love to her, and you didn't talk to her—but 'ow about those other little signs what count? I suppose you didn't make eyes at her, either. Eh?"

"Certainly not!" disclaimed Bruce virtuously.

"I never seen such a newchum," stated Roper. "You actually don't know what you've done. It would be funny if it wasn't so serious—but Stort is a nasty bloke to 'ave for an enemy. My ruddy oath, 'e is! Anybody in these waters will tell you that. Seeing as 'ow you're so dumb, I think I'd better tell you how things stand."

"For Heaven's sake, do!" cried the harassed youth.

"WELL, this is what happened, as I've pieced it together from what Billycan and Charley and Marua herself have told me—to say nothing o' Stort, who 'as been ragin' drunk for a week.

"Ever since you landed on the island, Marua 'as been after you to take her away from Stort. She couldn't come out and say so in so many words because according to her lights, which are New Guinea lights, that wouldn't be respectable. The man 'as got to seem to start things in such a case. But she could make eyes, to let you know 'ow she felt; and from all I've 'eard, you gave her back just as many eyes as she gave you.

"But you didn't do anything. You was expected to go to Stort and buy her from him, or else you was to get into a fight with 'im and take her away by force. Either way it would be decent for 'er to go with you; for she wasn't married to Stort, even by native ceremony, you understand, but was just 'is property.

"When you didn't play the game she got desperate and determined to bring matters to a 'ead. So she followed you into the scrub that day and put hibiscus flowers in her hair—which is a sign a woman wants to be courted—and sent Billycan down to the lugger with word to Stort of what she was doing. She wanted to bring you and 'im together, you see. A nervy thing to do, because if you turned 'er down she knew Stort would beat her 'arf to death, if 'e didn't kill her.

"Of course Stort did just what she knew 'e would do. You remember, 'e was drunk that morning, and not in the best o' humors toward you because of the way you acted when he opened your book; so when the boy came aboard with Marua's message 'e just got up and 'owled and started on your trail as fast as he could cover ground. 'E run so fast I couldn't keep up with 'im, so I hove to when I come abreast of your veranda, and sat down and waited for something to 'appen. I wasn't much worried about you, for I saw that Stort didn't stop to get firearms—too crazy mad, I suppose—and I knew if I went into the scrub I'd get lost.

"Well, just what 'appened in the scrub I don't know; and if you were out o' your 'ead with fever I don't suppose you know either. But Stort met up with you and found you together with Marua; and you 'ad a fight with 'im and bashed him about something cruel; and, you being the victor and the fight being about her, Marua just transferred 'erself from Stort to you, and your woman she is, according to her lights and all the nigger lights between 'ere and the Solomons. After the fight you must 'ave collapsed, and the lass picked you up and packed you out."

Roper stopped talking and puffed at a cigaret. Apparently he considered he had said everything there was to say, and he now awaited the other's comments. But Bruce lay quiet for a time, with closed eyes, trying to puzzle out the situation. He felt it was a farce, sheer nonsense; and yet the fat man's demeanor convinced him it was very serious business.

He had taken Stort's woman. Unwittingly, but, if Roper spoke truly, none the less effectively, he had captured and bound to him by force of arms a fuzzy-headed, savage native woman. He had assumed Stort's place in Marua's cosmos; in her eyes, and in the eyes of her people—yes, and in Roper's eyes, and in the eyes of all his kind—she had become his property, his light-o'-love, his "Mary!"

Sheer nonsense, of course! But the mere thought brought the fever-flush out upon his skin, and caused his stanch Presbyterian conscience to rise and rebuke him. Indeed, he censured himself pitilessly for his past actions. It was quite true, he had looked upon the comely brown girl with a warmth in his eyes that was not wholly pity. He had thought of her as a woman, and not as a native. He could excuse her acts, but not his own thoughts.

Silly nonsense! And here he was, a plighted man, with trustful Mazie awaiting his homecoming, and on Moorabal Island a New Guinea savage was his Mary!

Bruce felt like weeping, but he achieved a quavering laugh.

"Of course, it won't do," he addressed Roper. "It's silly rot. I can't have a native woman around me. I don't believe in that sort of thing—and besides I'm engaged. If what you say is true, I'll have to get rid of her."

Roper regarded him in none too friendly fashion.

"Look 'ere, m'lad, do you realize as 'ow Marua has kept you alive this last week?" he exclaimed suddenly. "I was sure I'd plant you. I couldn't do anything for you except fill you full of gin and quinin, and I've seen too many cases o' backwater to 'ave much faith in that. You'd 'ave gone sure, if it 'adn't been for the girl.

"She went out in the scrub and got roots and leaves, and brewed up the mess that pulled you through. She 'asn't slept more than a couple o' hours since you've been lying there. All I could do was sit outside, and shoo Stort away whenever he come around to cut your 'eart out. I took 'is guns and scrub-'atchet away from him, but of course there's lots o' things he can use to be nasty with. But Marua 'as stayed in here by your side, day and night, nursing you."

"I'm just as grateful to her as I can be," said Bruce. "I'll tell her so. But—what shall I do?"

"You seem blurry anxious to be shut of the best all-around lass between 'ere and Moresby," observed Roper. "A queer way to be grateful, I'm thinking. If you want to be rid of her so bad, you might turn 'er back to Stort—but, of course, 'e'll kill her if you do. Or you might give her to me. I'd take 'er in a minute; my oath, I would!

"But you 'ad better wait and see her before you make any decision; unless you don't care 'ow cruel you are to her. I tell you, lad, she 'asn't been nursing you this way just because she feels you are her owner. It's something more with 'er. These native girls 'ave got feelings, you know, even if most white men say they 'aven't. It's her 'eart you've got to think of. My oath, what wouldn't I give to 'ave a lass look at me the way that Mary looks at you!"

"But, good Heavens, man—you don't understand—Mazie—I can not——"

Bruce, invested with a sudden, nervous strength, sat bolt upright and ejaculated in a hysterical voice. The pearler grunted with astonishment, and swore, and forced the other to lie down again.

"Not a word more!" he exclaimed. "You'll be balmy again if you keep this up. 'Ere now, you stow the guff, and go to sleep!"

V

STORT had been on spree for more than seven days, and, as always happened when his drunkenness ran over a week's time, he was hearing things and sometimes seeing them. Last night, as he sat in his empty house, brooding over his great loss, Carter had come in from his grave and mocked and reviled him, and railed at him for a poltroon for not having already avenged himself upon his enemy.

At times, when the maggots in his mind bit extra sharply, Stort could see Carter seated at the other side of the table.

Carter was still dressed in the dirty white clothes he had been buried in, and he stank of the grave.

Stort was terrified of the leering, unsubstantial face of his old crony, and beseeched Carter to leave him and go back to the earth. Carter grimaced and sneered, and spoke words that ate like strong acid into the drunkard's brain.

Carter jeered at the livid bruises upon Stort's haggard face, at the finger-marks still visible upon his throat and at the craven spirit which suffered deep injury without effective resentment.

"She was your woman," said Carter. "That newchum, that milk-and-water nipper, took her away from you. He robbed you. She was your woman; you could do what you liked with her; and he interfered. He wanted her for himself. He was too good to be friends with the likes of you, but he took your woman. He took her into his house. She's there now, leaning over his bed, stroking his forehead, looking into his eyes——"

"Shut up!" cried Stort.

He cursed and picked up his bottle and hurled it straight into the taunting face across the table. The bottle went right through Carter, and smashed against the farther wall.

"He has robbed you," went on Carter's unperturbed voice. "She wants to stay with him. You'll never get her back. Unless——"

"I'll get him! I swear to —— I'll get him!" raged Stort.

"How will you get him?"sneered Carter. "You haven't got the guts to face Roper. Roper is on guard; Roper hates you; Roper would like to give you best. He's taken your guns, your pistols, your ax. You can't get by Roper. But Roper guards the door, the veranda. Have you forgotten the window? He sleeps beneath the window!"

"It is too high from the ground," objected Stort. "Roper would hear me if I tried to crawl in. And she—she is in the room with him!"

Carter leaned across the table until his livid, bloated face was but a few inches distant from Stort's fascinated and horrified eyes.

"Do you remember how I died?" asked Carter.

"Don't—don't talk about that!" pleaded Stort, in terror.

Carter grinned and his heavy chin dropped. There came out of his open mouth, not a tongue, but the loathsome head of a death adder.

Stort screamed. He fell out of his chair and scrambled across the floor to a corner of the room. He crouched here for some time in a quaking fear, his face hidden. When he did look up, the sight and sound of Carter had left the room and returned to the mound upon the hillside.

Hitherto, when Carter paid him a visit, Stort stopped drinking. The apparition was a warning to sober up. But this time his brain was too distracted with hate and grief to heed a warning. Indeed, he had already passed the border-line and become less a man than an embodied hate, sustained and fed by alcohol.

When his fear passed and he felt himself alone again, his first act was to open the cupboard. The rest of the night he spent pouring arrack down his throat; and the fiery fumes swirled and danced in his head until there finally took shape before his mind's eye a picture of his enemy writhing in a death agony—even as Carter had died long ago. It was a pleasing picture; Stort gloated over it.

His hate told him how to make the picture come true. At first he thought of dropping a death adder in through the open window of Bruce's hut. But the chances that the sluggish, short-fanged reptile would land upon his enemy's bare skin and bite were not great—and besides, the thought of his having to handle a snake completely unnerved him.

He thought of introducing the adder to Bruce's bed, in the daytime, through the medium of Billycan, who, he knew, was corruptible. But Roper and Marua both possessed sharp eyes and Billycan was clumsy; also, the native would demand pay in advance for so terrible a job, and, having drunk his pay, would more likely betray than obey him.

Consideration of Billycan as a tool finally suggested to Stort's mind the safe and certain plan; the plan whereby Bruce would die Carter's death, at Stort's hands, and the latter need not touch the slimy, writhing instrument. It was a brilliant plan; the more he thought it over, the surer seemed its success. Bruce would certainly die—as Carter died. He would never live to enjoy Marua. What would happen to himself afterward, whether detection and punishment, or not, Stort did not consider. His hatred and the drink made him too blind for that.

When the sun was up, Stort supplied himself with two fresh bottles of liquor—one for his own nourishment and one for the bribe—and with these on his person set out to accomplish his plan.

Roper was sitting upon Bruce's veranda, so Stort detoured through the scrub, to escape the pearler's vigilant gaze, and approached his first objective, Charley's kitchen, from the jungle. Charley had not yet arrived for the day's labors and Stort made off with an empty tucker-box.

It was a plain wooden box of the dimensions of an ordinary potato-box, which, at one time, it probably had been, and Charley, in his efforts to preserve his edibles against the jungle marauders, had fitted it with a hinged door of close-meshed wire screen. Anything larger than an ant could not get into the box if the door were closed; nor—and this pleased Stort—could anything larger than an ant, placed inside the box, get out.

He came upon his second objective paddling along the beach. Billycan was in fishing array and bound for the reef; for since Bruce had fallen sick and Marua had evicted him from the T-T house, Billycan was compelled, to his sorrow, to rustle his own tucker after the manner of his fathers.

"You catch plenty tucker alonga me today," said Stort when he had hailed the native. "You make pickaninny job, blackfella job; close up you get plenty tucker."

Billycan scratched himself and plucked his beard reflectively. The promise of food—white fellows' delicacies—interested him, but the mention of work took the joy out of the prospect.

"My word," he remarked without enthusiasm.

"Little job, pickaninny job," explained Stort. "You walk about alonga scrub, pick up *watu*—two, three *watu*——"

Billycan blinked his little eyes.

"Me no like that fella job!" he declared emphatically.

"Plenty tucker," urged Stort. "Bimeby job finish; you catch hot drink, big bottle, my word!"

He held up the bribe for the blackfellow's inspection.

Billycan's capacious mouth opened in his astonishment, and the fires of desire were kindled in his eyes. The offer smacked of the miraculous. Never, even in his most pleasant dreams, had Billycan ever imagined himself the recipient of such a gift. Hitherto his experience with the white man's magic drink had been limited to very occasional sips, chiefly purloined from forgotten glasses. But a full bottle! Had Billycan the imagination to accord himself a soul, he would have bartered it joyfully for such a prize. As Stort well knew.

"Me top fella, boss," he recommended himself eagerly. "Billycan bin make job good; me flash fella, my word!"

Stort nodded agreement. He even pulled the cork from the bottle and permitted the dazed and happy aboriginal a short drink. Then he returned the liquor to his pocket, with the promise to give it all when the task was completed. He knew that with the taste of the gin in his mouth Billycan would not forget or idle.

THE GAVE the tucker-box to the native, and carefully explained his needs. He wanted three death adders—"no pickaninny *watu;* catch him two, three big fella *watu!*"—captured and imprisoned, unharmed, beneath the screen of the box. He wanted a scrub rat alive and unharmed. He wanted these captives brought to him before the sun was hot. He would await Billycan and his burden at the place on the hillside where the "fellas gone finish" were buried.

Billycan went into the bush and Stort repaired immediately to the cemetery. He had chosen this spot because he thought Carter would like to witness the working-out of his vengeance. For an hour or more he sat upon the mound beneath which his friend abided so restlessly, and chuckled and talked between his legs to the one below, and sipped and sipped from the arrack bottle.

He had not slept in days, nor had aught more sustaining than liquor visited his stomach since the previous morning, yet he was not weary or hungry; indeed, not for long had his wrecked body felt so full of life. He was vitalized by his hate and made joyous because its appeasement was so certain and soon.

"I'll get him!" he declared to the grave beneath him. He crowed exultantly. "He'll go hard—like you, Carter! He'll howl, and roll, and swell up! I'll hear him! I'll tease the snakes; the ants will bite them; they'll bite the rat; I'll poison the spear; I'll get him! It's the nigger trick from up Sud-Est way, Carter. And I'll give him best!"

Soon Billycan came out of the scrub and approached him, carrying the box gingerly and at arms' length. It had not been a difficult, but an evil and somewhat fearsome task, this foraging for snakes with prong and noose in the dank ravines, and there was a nervous sweat upon Billycan's body. A thankful and explosive sigh escaped him as he gently set down the box at Stort's feet.

"Finish?" demanded the latter.

"My word; two, three big fella *watu* stop alonga box!" asserted Billycan, with emphasis.

Stort leaned over and peered through the screen. It was even as the native said. Squirming sluggishly and contentedly about the bottom of the box were three of the snakes whose venom, more deadly even than the cobra's, has earned the species its unenviable name. They were, as Billycan declared, "big fellas," each over two feet in length, with flat, hideous heads, and stout, untapered bodies terminating in sharp spines.

An ugly, disturbing sight even for normal eyes, and Stort, with the tremens in his blood, felt like screaming at the repulsive cargo. But his hate was strong, and it controlled his nerves and permitted him to gloat over the box.

He looked up questioningly. Billycan immediately produced his dilly-bag and opened it. Inside was a fat, half-grown kangaroo rat, with its long hind feet trussed with fiber. Stort laughed gleefully.

"Pop him in," he commanded, indicating the box. "You bin make that fella stop alonga box."

The native looked puzzled and troubled. But he obeyed the order. He lifted the screen cover, dumped in the rat and quickly secured the prison before any of the adders had a chance to lift a head above the box edge. The luckless rodent squealed in terror when he found himself in such dreadful company; but Stort noticed that the sluggish, even-tempered reptiles moved away from the intruder without any show of anger or disposition to attack. But he had a remedy for this mood.

He searched along the fringe of trees about the graveyard until he discovered one whose bole was encircled by a certain hollow-stemmed vine, in which a colony of flaming-tempered fiery-stinged green ants resided. He had the nervous Billycan carry the box of death to this spot. Then he took possession of the native's fishing-spear. It was a weapon admirably suited to his needs—a slender, hardwood shaft with a fire-hardened, needle-like point.

"What you bin make, boss?" queried Billycan anxiously.

Billycan did not like the proximity of the burial-ground; and even less he liked Stort's mysterious preparations. The thing Stort was about to do was a New Guinea secret and far beyond the Australian black-fellow's ken.

"Bin make magic; plenty debbil-debbil," announced Stort.

"My word!" ejaculated the native. His eyes widened with fear and awe. "Me no like stop along; me go walk about. Billycan bin finish job."

"Bin finish," agreed Stort.

He gave Billycan his reward and, hugging the bottle to his breast, the native ran swiftly to the jungle wall, slid into the foliage and was gone.

Chuckling, Stort watched the disappearance. Magic was a mighty word; he need not fear interfering visits from the natives during the day. Billycan's lips were sealed.

A sudden frenzied thumping and squealing from the box brought his attention back to his task. He peered within and nearly squealed himself, as the waves of delicious fear and horror thrilled him. For the rat was dying Carter's death. It lay upon its back, beating the air with its ineffectual fore-paws and one of the adders had its fangs sunk in the soft fur of the stomach. Even as Stort looked, the potent poison did its almost instant work, and the rat was dead.

But even more important in Stort's eyes was the sight of the green fire-ants boiling up into the box through the crack in its bottom, whole battalions of stinging furies, who flung themselves impartially upon the now agitated reptiles and upon the carcass.

This was the thing Stort desired. Not one snake-bite—even though it killed the rat—would suit his purpose. He wanted the carcass bitten again and again, until the adders' poison sacs were emptied; and the rodent's blood and tissues drenched with the horrible juice of death. It would not take long, he knew. Harassed and infuriated by the stinging ants, the snakes would strike often and blindly at the alien lump of flesh. A half-hour, perhaps; and then the burning, corrupting sun would do the rest.

He sat down upon a boulder, well without the range of the valorous insects, and waited until the last of his Dutch courage had slipped down his throat. He judged the time ripe then. Crossing to the box, which, by this time was, inside and outside, a green, moving carpet of ants, he carefully lifted the cover with the point of the spear. For a moment nothing happened; then one ant-clad adder slowly slid over the edge, and wriggled away into the undergrowth with its living freight.

The other two snakes did not appear, and, after a cautious interval, Stort approached closer, with weapon poised. The snakes lay inert upon the bottom of the box, beneath a surging flood of green; the body of the rat, however, had not an ant upon it; it was as if the insects sensed its uncleanliness. It was incredibly swollen and distorted.

Stort impaled the rat upon the spear-point. When he lifted it, a fluid that was neither blood nor water dripped from the wound. Holding the thing as far from him as length of arm and spear-shaft permitted, Stort bore it to the very foot of Carter's grave, where the sun blazed all day upon baked ground. Here he left it, with the spear-point still thrust into the sodden flesh, and hurried away home, where something might be had to strengthen his quaking heart and jumping nerves.

All the rest of the day Stort passed in his house. He drank steadily, only breaking off to go out on his porch and hurl threats and imprecations at the indifferent house across the way. He did not—indeed, he could not—grow drunken. Though his brain was afire, he was past the stage when he might roll and stagger in his cups. He was hag-ridden by his hateful purpose, and each hour that passed and each glass that was emptied into his purple mouth but strengthened it.

When it was nearly sunset he stole out and again ascended the slope to the cemetery. There was a rank and poisonous odor over Carter's grave, and the sun and the hours had made of the rat a shapeless chunk of rotting meat. So evil was the mess in which the spear-point rested that a baneful bluish light hovered over it.

With care Stort withdrew the spear and held its point to the sun. A glance, and he whooped with joy and called upon Carter to arise and behold. For the spear-point was thinly covered with a brown, gummy substance which glistened like amber in the sunlight. It was the death adder's death disclosed to view.

Stort held the deadly weapon over the grave. Down in the ground he could hear his crony's growling laugh. He laughed in reply, a shrill, insane cackle.

"I'll give him best!" he vowed.

VI

BRUCE should have been asleep these many hours. He knew this of his own body, for a great weariness weighed upon him. He knew it of his ears, for Roper told him bluntly—

"If you don't snooze, them fever bugs will start scoffing you again!"

His eyes told him, also, for Marua, in endless pantomime, counseled sleep.

But he could not get to sleep, and it was Marua's presence, and the constant thought of her, that kept him wakeful. If only she would go! Then he might sleep.

He was torn between panic and pity; and his weakened body was no fit terrain for strong emotions in conflict. He wanted to bid her begone, but he could not. She was his savior. Her strong arm had lifted him up from death. And, as Roper informed him and his senses confirmed, she loved him.

She loved him, this bare savage! Her movements, her eyes, her acts, all declared her affection. It was smothering him.

She moved about his house with the quiet assurance of one who lived there, who belonged there. She was the woman of the place. She put things in order. She had thrown aside the modest but hampering cloth and went about her housewifery clad only in the nipa-leaf petticoat of her native jungles. It was quite evident she considered herself at home.

She hovered over Bruce like a mother over a sick babe. She held him up while he drank his broth, and the smell of the vegetable oil with which she had freshly anointed her bushy head almost caused his stomach to reject the food. She lifted him bodily in her muscular brown arms and held him close while with one bare foot she ironed out the creases in his bed. She squatted beside the cot and fanned him with a leaf, lightening somewhat the heavy heat and keeping him free of the annoyance of flies. She crooned a guttural and not unmusical lullaby into his ear.

In her every act and attitude she was a woman caring for a thing possessed and cherished, caring for her own man. In her every glance she declared this. Bruce turned his head away that he might not see her face. He could not endure the dumb, dog-like devotion in her big soft eyes.

So Bruce tossed and fretted and slept not at all. As the day waned, his blood grew hot again. The "bugs" were "scoffing," as Roper foretold. When the afternoon shadows came into the room, he began to see unsubstantial, unformed things lurking in the corners. He promptly sat up in bed to observe them more closely.

Then it was that Marua, whose face had shown growing concern for some time, called peremptorily to Roper. The latter waddled in from the veranda, where he had dozed away the day.

"No good; bin go balmy," she explained succinctly. "You stop along; me go catch sleep bush, come back close up."

She slipped noiselessly from the room; and though Bruce did not see her departure, he immediately sensed her absence. It was as if a weight were lifted from his chest. It was a tremendous relief to feel no longer her eyes upon him. To the pearler's surprize, he was docile and lay back with closed eyes and rested.

Only once during the hour of the girl's absence did he speak.

"She makes me nervous," he said. "When she is in the room, I can't rest, I can't sleep. She makes me light-headed——"

"Tush, tush; stow that gab!" commanded Roper with good-natured gruffness. "She'll put you to sleep, right enough. She's gone to get some Paggara juice, from that shrub the black-fellows use to poison fish. You know, 'wild dynamite!' Up Moresby way, where she 'ails from, the nigs use it like the Chinks use opium. I've taken it in fever. It 'asn't no taste, and it'll put you to sleep dead-O."

Bruce was too weary to argue, and he felt it was hopeless to attempt to make Roper see his view-point. The man was too coarse-fibered.

"If she would only go away!" he exclaimed. Then, when he thought of the debt he owed the brown girl, he felt mean and small-souled. "But she's splendid, Roper, and I'm deeply grateful to her," he added.

After a long silence he heard Roper stir, and opening his eyes, he saw Marua in the room. She had returned as noiselessly as she had gone. The room was full of sunset shadow, and she was lighting the lamp. When it burned, Bruce saw she held in her hand a bottle, a common trade-gin bottle. Roper crossed to her side, and she held the bottle against the light. It contained a spoonful or two of milky fluid which, Bruce knew, was the sap of the Paggara shrub.

Roper got a glass of water from the crock filter in the corner, and the girl, with great care, measured a few drops of the narcotic into the glass. She brought it to the bedside, touched Bruce's brow with her cool soft hand and lifted him that he might drink comfortably. He quaffed the draft eagerly. Anything for sleep, for oblivion, for forgetfulness of this horrid problem that faced him! Anything to forget this unwanted woman who smothered him with love!

He lay back, and felt a delicious tingle start from his stomach and journey all over his body to the very ends of his various members. It was succeeded by a lethargy equally delicious. He drowsed and felt himself drifting down a river which flowed slow and ever slower. His ears were filled with murmurings. He heard Marua's voice from a great distance; she talked excitedly, rapidly, but he could not distinguish words. It was not worth while to try. Nothing was worth while. The current of the river was checked. He stopped—and slept.

VII

"ME WALK about beach," explained Marua. "Come along that fella, Billycan. My word, him flash fella, plenty drunk, sit down dead-O. Pick up bottle."

Roper held the bottle in his hand and squinted at it pensively.

"It's a Q-T bottle, sure," he said. "Some o' Stort's gin. Now where the blurry did the nig get it?"

Marua nodded an anxious head.

"Me no like," she declared. "Bad fella, him Stort. Bimeby try and make finish my boss fella."

She leaned over the sleeping youth and spread her arms in a wide, sweeping gesture. It was as if she spread a cover over the inanimate form; a protecting cover of love, designed to turn aside the shafts of ill-fortune. Roper watched her, with his great moon of a face made somber by a frown. He was frankly puzzled. He too "did not like."

"I wonder where the nig got it?" he repeated. Then, observing that the girl was really frightened, he added in a lighter voice: "It doesn't matter. It doesn't mean anything. 'E's balmy drunk, is Stort. I clapped eyes upon 'im just before the sun dipped, streaking it into the bush. Like as not 'e was crazy enough to give Billycan the drink. Like as not 'e left it out, or dropped it, and the nig nipped it. Doesn't mean anything."

Marua dissented.

"Long time me sit down with that fella," she reminded Roper. "Me know that fella; plenty bad. No give gin. Him like make finish us fella."

"It isn't like Stort to be careless or free-'anded of his drink," admitted Roper. "And I dare say 'e would like to give us best—at least, the lad and me. But 'e can't do anything, 'e can't 'urt us, while I'm here. I've got 'is guns. And when I leave, the lad will be up and about, and able to look after 'imself, and you too. Besides, Stort is giving 'imself best. 'E'll have D. T's. in another day or I'm no judge. You'll have to make 'im well, Marua."

The girl clicked her teeth.

"Make him go finish," she vowed.

Roper laughed.

"I bet you would, too," he commented. He held the bottle to the light and scrutinized the thick white liquor of the "wild dynamite." "And a few drops more o' this than you gave the lad would 'make 'im go finish,' eh, m'lass? 'Ow about it; is there enough o' the stuff 'ere to make a fella go finish?"

Marua glanced incuriously at the bottle.

"Make two, three fella go finish," she said.

Then she dismissed the pearler from her mind, if not from her presence, and squatted down to fan her sleeping lord.

Roper placed the bottle upon the table and went out to the veranda. He believed what he had told Marua—Stort was helpless, and nothing could happen to him or the girl or their sleeping charge. But he was sufficiently impressed and disturbed by Marua's discovery upon the beach to thrust his revolver into the waist-band of his trousers and to move his hammock from the corner of the veranda to a spot just opposite the door to the interior.

Roper was a sailor, and he slept as lightly as a cat. When something heavy thudded against the side of the house, he was awake on the instant. It was late night, and black—and still. He sat up in the hammock, the pistol half-drawn, and peered into the darkness. Nothing moved outdoors.

A subdued exclamation from the room caused him to jerk his head around and look indoors. The lamp was burning and, in contrast to the night he had tried to pierce, the interior seemed brightly illumined.

Bruce was sleeping peacefully; Roper could see the even rise and fall of his chest. Marua stood at the bedside in a tense attitude, staring at the window over the bed. Roper stared at the window, too.

He saw Stort's face suddenly framed there, Stort's leering, maniacal face. Marua screamed, and he himself shouted hoarsely. Something leaped through the window, something long and brown, like a slender streak of brown light—and as it moved Marua threw herself face down upon the bed, covering the sick man with her body in a movement quick as light itself.

Roper had the pistol free by this time, and he fired with snap aim at the face in the window. The face disappeared.

Roper dropped lightly to the floor, and rushed indoors. As he approached the bed, he nearly stepped upon the point of a native fishing-spear that lay upon the floor. He did not heed it, but bent over the bed and gently lifted Marua. The girl was terrified, trembling. She bled from a cut upon the back of her shoulder.

"It's nothing, lass; it's all over," soothed the pearler. "I got 'im, I know. The cut's nothing."

When he set her upon her feet, her trembling increased. He saw her face, and gulped in his astonishment. The face was contorted, and the pupils of the staring eyes seemed to fill the entire sockets.

"Me go burn," she gasped.

Roper stooped quickly and picked up the spear. He held the point to the lamp, and gave a curse that was half groan. He, too, knew New Guinea ways; he, too, had sailed in Sud-Est waters. He knew a poisoned spear.

Marua knew it too. The first spasm had passed, and she was quiet, very quiet.

"*Watu*—me finish," she said softly. "Me bin finish close up."

"Good ——!" exclaimed Roper helplessly.

She began to twitch again, to twitch and tremble. Roper regarded her with despair. He knew there was nothing he could do to help her. There was nothing any one could do. Unless—he glanced at the revolver in his hand. But he could not bring himself to do that—not yet.

With a visible effort Marua conquered for a moment the pain which twisted her.

"Me bin finish quick," she said calmly. "Me not burn; me sleep."

She lifted the bottle which contained the potent drug she had given Bruce. Unhindering, fascinated, Roper watched her. He watched the bottle reach her lips, and slowly tilt, and the white fluid run into her mouth. All of it, every drop, she sucked in. Then her hand opened, and the bottle crashed upon the floor, and she smiled at him. She turned toward the bed, but before she reached it she fell. When Roper reached her side her heart was stopped.

When he was satisfied she was dead, Roper took the lamp and went outdoors. Outside the window he found his man. Stort faced the stars and there was a hole in his forehead.

"Good riddance!" said Roper.

He could see Stort's track upon the ground. The man had crawled to the window on his belly, like a prowling blackfellow. He could see where Stort made his misstep, which made noise and aroused the house. Just in front of the window was a half-buried bottle. It was one of the bottles Bruce had thrown out of the window the day he moved in. It was canted in freshly disturbed earth, for Stort's foot had pressed and slipped upon it.

"I always said the bottle would be the death o' you, Stort!" said Roper as he fastened his hand upon the dead man's collar.

Then he plodded back to the veranda, dragging Stort behind him. He laid him out in the corner of the veranda, and covered him with a blanket from his own bed. A moment later he performed the same office for Marua, but he placed her as far distant from Stort as the veranda permitted.

When he was through, he went inside and raided the T-T locker for liquor. He felt the need of a drink. When he had obtained it, he drew up a chair beside the bed and composed himself to await the coming of day. Bruce was still sleeping, and Roper knew he would continue to sleep for many, many hours yet and really needed no watching. But Roper felt the need of company.

VIII

IT WAS the next afternoon when Bruce returned to consciousness. He awoke clear-headed and hungry, but wofully weak. Roper leaned over him with a bowl of steaming, savory soup and packed the pillows behind him and held the bowl while he greedily gulped the contents.

When he leaned back again upon a freshened bed he allowed his eyes to rove curiously about the room. She was not there. It was a blessed relief.

He noticed Roper eying him narrowly. He noticed, too, that the fat man seemed careworn and fatigued. His placid round face for once was grave and lined.

"You look ragged," Bruce said. "Have a bad night with me?"

Roper might truthfully have answered yes, and added that he had a bad morning, as well, superintending the growth of two new mounds in the plot on the hillside. But he merely said:

"Just a bit o' sleep lost. I don't need it as much as you. Now you close your eyes and snooze away some more."

Bruce was willing to obey. He felt he would be asleep again in a jiffy. Still, he couldn't help being curious. He was glad she was absent, but he wondered when she would return.

"W-where is she?" he asked the pearler. "Brewing up some fresh dose for me?"

"No," said Roper.

"She'll be back, hanging over me, in a moment, I suppose." pursued the boy ungraciously.

"No, she's gone," stated Roper.

"Gone!" echoed Bruce blankly. Then as the word sank in, animation crept into his voice. "Gone! You mean—you mean, she's gone away? She won't be back?"

"No, she won't be back," said Roper. "She went last night. So did Stort. Now shut up and go to sleep."

"So did Stort? Not—not together?" exclaimed Bruce.

"Yes," was Roper's short answer.

Bruce lay quiet a time, trying to digest the amazing information. It was too good almost to be true. He was conscious of a lightness of heart he had not felt since—not since the moment when the purser of the *Island Queen* had handed him Mazie's book.

It was a thought that gripped him. He appealed again to Roper.

"Will you hand me that black book; the one over there on the table?" he asked. "No, no, I don't want to read it; just to hold it. I'll go to sleep, I know."

Roper got it for him, and he held it to his breast with one weak, uncertain arm. It warmed his heart; he drew strength from it, and courage. He felt as if he had escaped from ugly darkness into light, from nightmare into reality. Mazie's book, Mazie's love, between him and harm. What an idiot he had been to think that anything could come between him and Mazie! What a fool to fear a naked brown woman! Now he was clear-headed, he could see the absurdity of the thing. Marua—and Stort—gone away together!

Suddenly Bruce laughed. "She went with Stort! Now, wasn't that just like native woman?"

"Yes. Shut up," answered Roper.

THE CHAMPION

(*Suggested by a story of Jack London's*)

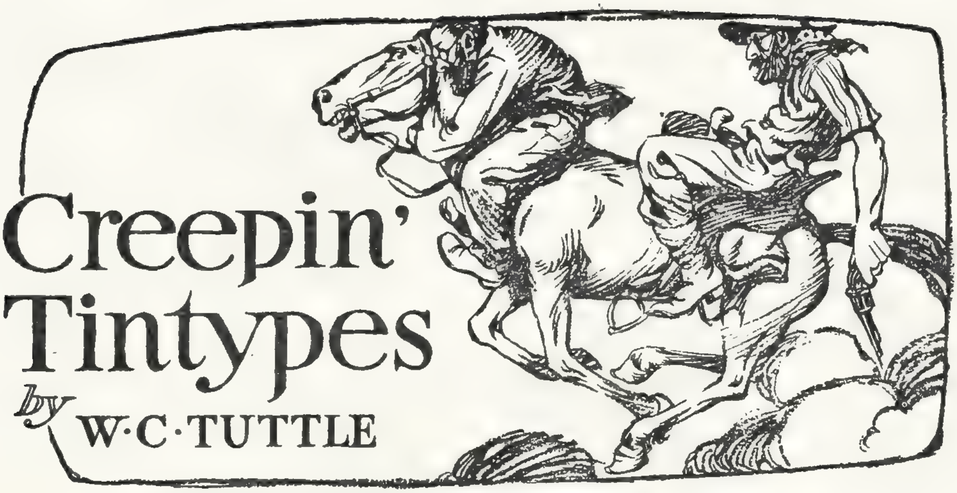
by Berton Braley

IT AIN'T the kid that's sittin' over there
  Who has me scared. He's young and strong all right,
But all I gotta do is box with care
  And I can come out winner in this fight.
No, it ain't him I'm worryin' about;
  It's something in his corner that I see;
Something I know—an' know beyond a doubt
  Is lurkin' there an' waitin' there for me.

Why, ever since the day I won the belt—
  That's five years, now—I've seen it every time
That I have fought; an' though at first I felt
  Like sneerin' at it—bein' in my prime—
Each bout I see it clearer than it's been,
  An' some day some young feller's gonna crawl
Between the ropes—an' he'll be It—an' then
  There'll be another champion, that's all!

What is it that I see? Why, bo, it's Youth!
  Youth with the punch, the vigor an' the zest.
It's bound to come; I gotta face the truth.
  An' when it does, though I may fight my best,
Use all my skill an' cunnin', clinch an' hold,
  It's gonna rock me, close my swimmin' lamps,
An' then, the knock-out; me a-lyin' cold
  An' Youth announced the champ of all the champs.

For I was Youth when I jumped into fame
  An' put the other champion on the shelf,
An' this I know, because I know the game,
  It's Youth will slip the same thing to myself!



Creepin' Tintypes

by W·C·TUTTLE

Author of "Tippecanoe and Cougars Two," "Between Pike's Peak and a Pickle."

THERE ain't no question but what me and "Dirty Shirt" Jones would like to go back to Piperock. Sort of a call of the wild, I reckon, and at that there ain't many places wilder than Piperock.

Me and Dirty started in to help "Scenery" Sims, the sheriff, put "Tombstone" Todd in jail. It was dark and Scenery didn't have no handcuffs, so me and Dirty helped him handle his prisoner. Me and Dirty have peered upon the wine when it was red and neither of us cared much for Scenery with his squeaky little voice; so when Piperock awoke the next morning they had to dynamite the jail to get their sheriff out of his own cell. No, I don't know where Tombstone went.

Thereupon Piperock riseth in a body and follers me and Dirty plumb to the border. Maybe they wanted to congratulate us, but we're very, very modest. Me and Dirty ain't bad. We was just joking with Scenery.

Anyway, I don't think Tombstone was guilty of rustling Seven A cows. He said he wasn't, and there wasn't no reason for him lying about it to me and Dirty, unless he was afraid we'd want part of the proceeds. This is why we're in a strange county, at a strange bar and talking with a stranger. He's a pe-culiar-looking *hombre,* sort of sad-eyed, as he peers through his glass of hard liquor.

"The West," says he, "is the bunk. There ain't none such."

"What for kind of a West does you require?" asks Dirty, like he was trying to sell the feller a necktie.

"Wild," says he. "Wild like the writers tell us about. The kind of a West that Buffalo Bill knew. I've hunted for it loud and long, but she ain't and that's an end to it. Have another drink?"

"Mister," says Dirty, "you came West but you never got there. Somehow you missed Piperock."

"Whither lieth said Piperock?"

"Lieth is a good word," nods Dirty. "In direction, she's south of here and as the crow flies she's a hundred miles."

"Is that real West?"

"Man, that's the West. All others is imitations and frauds."

"You brings me great cheer," says he. "Bartender, do your duty."

"You bring cheer to two of us, the same of which makes three cheers."

"I wouldst have you take me to this Piperock place."

"Yeah?" says Dirty. "Me and Ike Harper are not taking anybody within sheriff-shot of Piperock, although our hearts are homesick for the old village of vice. We wouldst go there, pardner, but circumstances are against us. We'll tell yuh some few things pertaining to that hamlet of horror, but that's as far as we'll go.

"The city limits of Piperock are the distance a sheriff can ride in two hours and then shoot with a .30-30; the same of which marks a spot several miles removed from the turmoil of town. Me and Ike are outside that distance and we stays out, eh, Ike?"

"You couldn't 'a' said more if yuh hired a hall," says I. "Why does yuh wish to see the West in its raw state, mister?"

"I am a realist," says he, dreamy-like. "I hate the artificial."

"Gawd bless and keep yuh," says Dirty. "You'll find it there, but yuh may never return back. The sheriff sells cemetery space."

He absorbs his liquor and seems a heap interested.

"Is there a bank there that might be robbed and does they have a stage that might have a reason for carrying bullion?"

"Now," says Dirty, "me and Ike appears shocked at your question, but at the same time we're a heap interested. Let's go outside where there ain't no walls to have ears and speak of such things as banks and stages. Yuh never can tell who might overhear us and suspect us of philanthropy."

We goes across the street and sets down on the sidewalk.

"Now," says Dirty, "there is a bank and there is a stage. Me and Ike are broke, but up to the present our records are as clean as our six-guns."

"Would you know how to rob a bank or a stage?" he asks. "Do the job like it ought to be done?"

"We ain't got no references from bank nor stage-lines," says I.

"But," says Dirty, "we're honest. We'll split three ways, mister."

He thinks it over for a while, and then says—

"Well, I feel that I've struck what I've been looking for."

"That's what 'Mighty' Jones said when he fell off into Hellgate Cañon and dislodged a hunk of galena ore, fifty feet from the bottom," says Dirty.

"A feller never knows his luck till the wheel stops."

"You two are going with me," says he.

"Us two ain't goin' to do no such a thing," says I. "You don't know Piperock like we do."

"That's why you're going with me."

"You're a danged poor fortune-teller," observes Dirty. "Me and Ike would last about as long as a snowball in Yuma and you'd be alone. They'd put us in a nice little jail and then you'd get lost, strayed or stolen.

"No, sir. You write to all your folks, predictin' your demise, leave your watch and chain with the bartender, and then walk into town, unarmed and with your hands in the air."

"By golly, that's the town I've been looking for," says he. "Thanks."

"Mister, she's a great place for freaks," says Dirty. "You won't be in that place long until you'll join P. T. Barnum."

"Barnum?" says he. "Barnum is dead."

"Sure—I know it."

"Yes," says he, after a while. "You're going with me. I'll disguise you so nobody will know you, you understand? I must have you with me."

"Mister," says I, "are you just a—— tenderfoot who wants to be a bad man, or what's all your talk about banks and bullion?"

"I am a realist, as I said before. The West has never been depicted as I feel it really is and I am going to show them something new. I have a story, 'The Twilight Trail,' which has been partly done, but I want realism. I want the spirit of the old West in it. I want a stage hold-up, a bank robbery, with real people in it, in a Western town—real West. Now, do you understand?"

"Just like I do Chinese," says I. "You said a lot, but she don't somehow fit into my mind. You don't want much, I *sabe* that part of it, don't you, Dirty?"

"Yeah, he's plumb modest and meek, Ike. Are you a writer?"

"Moving-pictures, gents. I am Llewellyn Waldemar."

"Sounds like a breed of bird-dogs," says Dirty, "but his ears are too small."

"You don't need to insult me," he snaps.

"Now, wait," begs Dirty. "Did you ever see a Llewellyn dog?"

"No, I never did."

"Well, then don't get insulted. They're a —— nice-lookin' animile. You say you're a movin'-pitcher?"

"No, I take 'em."

"Hm-m-m-m," says Dirty. "I never seen any, but I've heard tell about 'em. Does them pitchers make yuh think they're movin'?"

THE feller looks at Dirty, like he was a new species of animal, and then wipes his eyes. He wipes his eyes several times and acts like he had a fish-bone in his throat, but he gets all right after while and says:

"Come on. I'm going to find a disguise for you to wear."

"You're a wonder if you can conceal me," says Dirty, who is cock-eyed in one optic. "All them snake-hunters has to do is take one look at me and I'm due to chase buffalo in the happy hunting-ground."

"Smoked glasses will fix you," says he.

"Smoked glasses won't help my bow-legs," says I. "Magpie says he can roll me like a hoop."

"I never thought I'd live to see the day when I'd have to look at Piperock through smoked glasses," wails Dirty.

Well, he fixed us up; that's a cinch. When he got through with us we looked like a couple of shepherds gone to seed. Down at one of them two-handed stores he purchased us both a outfit. He got us each a pair of smoked specs and some whiskers which makes us resemble a pair of owls.

"Your home town won't recognize you now," says he.

"No," says Dirty, "but that won't profit us much. Piperock may not penetrate our disguise, but that won't stop 'em from pot-shooting a pair of freaks."

"There's one cinch," says I. "They won't never kill us in our own names."

He takes us up to a hotel where all his stuff is and we sets down on the bed while he packs up.

"What kind of a sheriff have they got in Piperock?" he asks.

"He's a wonder," says Dirty, "and very fast with a gun."

Then me and Dirty thinks about Scenery Sims. He's about five feet two inches tall and his face is so danged thin that his mustache looks like a buffalo-robe hanging on a hatchet. I could rummage around in a sack and get a gun faster than Scenery could pull one out of his holster.

Waldemar got us a pair of valises to pack our own clothes in and then we drinks to our disguises and pilgrims to the depot.

"I know," says Dirty, as we climb on the train, "I know —— well that we're pilin' up for grief for our side. We ain't got no sense, Ike."

"They'll never know you," says Waldemar. "After we're dead they will," wails Dirty, "and I ain't never deceived anybody yet. I can just hear 'Old Testament' Tilton sayin', 'Man is of few days and full of trouble, O, my brethren, and these two grabbed off more than they could chew,' and then the Cross J quartet will sing, 'Jee-e-e-roo-o-o-sa-lem, Jee-e-e-roo-o-o-sa-lem, lee-e-ft up your voice an' see-e-ng.'"

"The Holy City," says Waldemar. "A beautiful thing."

"She's only skin-deep with that bunch," sighs Dirty. "I hope they just bury me and dispense with the sermon and songs."

"We won't hear none of it," says I. "We'll be layin' there with our smoked glasses on and a cactus flower on our breast."

"I think I'm goin' to like Piperock," says Waldemar.

"Your taste is all in your mouth, then," says Dirty. "What are we supposed to be, in case anybody asks us?"

"You two?"

He thinks for quite a while, and then says:

"Tell you what—you two are scientists, looking for the remains of a—a dinosaur. Mister Jones will be Professor Doolittle and Mister Harper will be Professor Smythe. How's that for names?"

"Lookin' for a dinny-sor," nods Dirty. "Might as well die for that as anything else, I reckon. Do we have to describe said—uh—thing? Is it a predatory animile, bird of prey or a crippled crawler?"

"The dinosaur," says he, "died a million years ago."

"Some fortune-teller likely told him what Piperock was goin' to be like," says Dirty.

* * *

WE GOT off the train at Paradise, just in time to catch Art Miller's stage to Piperock, and on that stage is "Magpie" Simpkins and Judge Steele. Magpie looks us over, careful-like and then shakes his head.

"There ain't none," says he.

"None what?" asks Dirty.

"E-clipse of the sun."

"Professor Smythe and Professor Doolittle have ruined their eyes working on scientific data," explains Waldemar.

"Why confine your post mortem to eyes?" asks Magpie. "'Pears to me that they've ruined the rest of 'em, too. I suppose that one—" pointing at me—"got warped in the legs from studyin' the shape of the earth. Can't they talk United States?"

"They were born in this country," says Waldemar.

"What part?" asks the judge.

"All of us, you —— fool!" I snaps. "Think we were assembled?"

"Goin' to Piperock?" asks Magpie.

"Yes," says Waldemar. "Yes, we are bound for there."

"On a mission?" asks the judge.

"Mostly for a rest," says Waldemar.

"You likely will be," admits Magpie, "and there's plenty of room in the jail."

We goes to Sam Holt's hotel. Old Sam sizes us up kinda close-like, and then Waldemar says—

"Have you three rooms?"

"I have," says old Sam, "and two of 'em I'll keep."

"What do you mean?" asks Waldemar.

"Them two," pointing at me and Dirty, "can't get no room from me. The last shepherd what stayed in my hotel left a lot of his mee-nag-i-ree behind."

"Your danged old hotel didn't need 'em," says Dirty. "You ain't changed blankets since the battle of Little Big Horn."

"What do you know about me?" he asks. "Who in —— are you?"

"I'm Professor Doolittle," says Dirty, "and I'm lookin' for a dinny-sor."

"You don't look like you'd do much and I ain't got none today," says Sam, mean-like. "You —— shepherds are always loco about something."

"Can we sleep in the barn?" I asks.

"No, yuh can't! My horses are all pets."

"Isn't there any other hotel?" asks Waldemar.

"I can give yuh a place to sleep," squeaks a voice behind us, and we turns to see Scenery Sims.

"Ah," says Waldemar, "another landlord looking for business."

"I ain't no landlord—I'm the sheriff," squeaks Scenery. "I've got a empty jail if yuh wants a place to sleep."

Me and Dirty are sort of thinking it over when Magpie Simpkins shows up. He asks what the trouble is, and Sam Holt tells him.

"Scientists is always welcome to my shack," says Magpie. "I've got room."

"We don't wish to deprive yuh," says Dirty.

"There ain't no depravity about it," says Magpie. "I hankers to talk with learned men, being as this is such a ignorant neighborhood, and you're just as welcome as the flowers in January. What seek ye here?"

"I'm lookin' for a dinny-sor," says Dirty.

"Never heard of him," says Magpie. "There used to be a Dinny McCall workin' for the Five Dot outfit, down near Sulphur Flat."

"This has been dead a million years," explains Dirty.

"Oh," says Magpie, fussing with his mustache. "Oh, yeah. That was before I came here. What killed him?"

"Wear and tear, I reckon," says Dirty.

He takes me and Dirty down to his cabin, and makes us to home.

"I had a pardner once," says Magpie, "but the —— fool went loco, and some law-abidin' citizens chased him across the border."

"Did he done wrong?" asks Dirty.

"If he ever done right he came back and corrected himself. Him and another cross between a bed-bug and a bee-sting went away together, and Piperock profiteth thereby. Make yourselves to home. You gents comes here at a opportune time, you know it? Tomorrow is the tenth anniversary of Piperock and we're goin' to celebrate."

"Celebrate?" whispers Dirty, hoarse-like. "Celebrate what? Is the town married?"

"Anniversary," explains Magpie, "means a year. Piperock is ten years old and she's goin' to celebrate her growth and civilization. This is her birthday.

"They will come from near and far, gents, and great will be the day and date. There will be bronco-bustin', et cettery, and bull-doggin' of steers. There will be ropin' contests, et cettery and some shootin'. She'll be worth your patience."

Magpie goes out and me and Dirty sets there and looks at each other.

"My ——!" gasps Dirty. "I feel that everything is not well with my soul. Somebody is goin' to see Dirty Shirt Jones behind these whiskers and specs and I'll be forced to stand on nothin' and look up a rope."

"Be of good cheer," says I, "for I will be with thee. They'll have something except Piperock's birthday to celebrate next year."

"Do scientists drink hard liquor, Ike?"

"They has a throat and a tongue," says I.

And then we pilgrims up-town, and goes into Buck Masterson's saloon, where we gets fortified against our fears of the near future. Waldemar is there, and Waldemar has surrounded himself with enough hooch to make him expand considerable. When we gets there he's talkin' politics with "Half Mile" Smith, and "Swan River," and neither of them snake-hunters knows anything about politics, except who is sheriff.

He introduces us to them two misfits, and they gets agreeable.

"Mister Smythe," says Swan River, looking me over, "your legs are twins to the legs of a —— fool I know, but from the waist up you look like a bum thrower. I'm pleased to meetcha."

"He sure is built so he don't have to go around nothin'," agrees Half Mile.

"He's a very brilliant man," says Waldemar. "They both have degrees."

"They look about zero to me," says Buck Masterson.

"They know things which are concealed from ordinary men," says Waldemar.

"Uh-huh," says Half Mile. "I shouldn't be surprized. Any horse-thief is in the same fix—if he's got any sense."

A little later on we corrals Waldemar and asks him what he thinks of the town.

"You sure led me to the right place," says he. "I have dreamed of this kind of a place."

"You ought to stick to dreams," advises Dirty. "We're wishin' you'd hurry up and finish your business here, 'cause me and Ike hankers for the open places. *Sabe?* This city air stifles our lungs and makes our necks ache."

"I'm framing it all up in my mind," says he, "and in the morning we'll set up the camera in the hotel window which will give me a full shot at the street, with the bank in the foreground, and then—can you two get horses?"

"I dunno," says Dirty. "We have got 'em—at times."

"Maybe a little risky for you two," says he. "I'll have two of 'em at the hitch-rack across the street. I won't have you ride into town, because some one might spot you. I can fake the entrance. You fellows will dress in your range clothes, you understand? At the right time you will come around the corner of the saloon, swing on to your horses, dash across the street, where one of you will go inside, rob the bank and come out, get your horses and dash out of town. I hope the sheriff will get quick action with the posse."

"My ——!" gasps Dirty. "You're all through with us, are yuh? You can't use us any further, mister? What has we done to you that you should wish our demise?"

"You ain't taking many chances," says he. "You'll take 'em so by surprize that they'll forget everything."

"Except to shoot," says I. "Piperock never forgets their guns. No, sir, you've got to figure out something easier than that."

"It's a chance of a life-time," says he, sad-like, and then he gets this idea—

"I'll give you a hundred dollars apiece."

"When?" asks Dirty.

"After the robbery."

"Be a sport and make it a million apiece," says Dirty. "We'll never live to collect and a man don't mind dying for a big stake."

"You can keep what you get from the bank."

"We ain't goin' to take no money," says I. "We're just goin' in and come right out again. *Sabe?* Folks will think it's a robbery."

"I want this done right," says he. "I want the real thing. Take it and then bring it back."

"Well," says Dirty, "if you feel thataway—how about yuh, Ike?"

"It makes me no never mind, Dirty. When they finds my remains with my dear hands folded around stolen money it won't hurt my reputation none. I'm willing to do danged near anything, so as we get away where I can take off this beard. My own whiskers are growing circles inside 'em."

"Is the hundred satisfactory?" asks Waldemar.

"In advance," nods Dirty. "I'm goin' to enjoy myself before the old feller with the hay-hook comes along and cuts me off at the pockets."

WALDEMAR starts to argue, but we both stands pat and he gives us the money. A hundred dollars is a lot of money to a man who expects to die the next day. There ain't no rainy days in his future. He don't care a whoop what comes to pass. Some folks might prepare themselves by praying, but me and Dirty never have asked for anything we ain't got the nerve to go and get for ourselves. We just throws dull care out of the window and gets cheerful.

Into our rosy existence cometh "Big Foot" Benson and "Hoodoo" Harris. Them two pelicans proclaims it open season on anything that comes in bottles.

"You're a danged queer-looking pair," says Big Foot, "but it takes all kinds of folks to herd sheep. Klahowya."

"Your whiskers ain't orthodox," says Hoodoo, peering at Dirty, "or has you reverted to the reptiles and sheds your skin in the hot days?"

"We're scientists," says Dirty, "and we're lookin' for a dinny-sor."

"Oh, yeah," says Hoodoo. "Well, you come to the right place, gents. The Lord knows you can find anything here, except a square deal. Why does you cover your eyes with gloomy glasses thataway? Does you hanker for the dark side of life?"

"Yuh never could find a dinny-sor with the naked eye," says I, and they accepts the verdict.

That was one wild night for science. I reckon every puncher within fifty miles showed up for the celebration, being as there's prizes offered, and me and Dirty, after absorbing considerable cheer, has a hard time sticking to plain science.

Dirty had a fight with Mighty Jones, when the two of 'em gets to discussing whether man came from monkey or not. Mighty debates that they are, and offers Dirty as a living proof. Two sheep-herders from over on Medicine Creek, cries on my neck and calls me "brother," and I licked 'em both.

Yes, it sure was a regular evening and my throat was raw from trying to change my natural voice and talk like a scientist ought to talk. Dirty Shirt's whiskers tried to crawl under his chin several times, but the crowd was too joyful to pay any attention to whiskers.

Somehow I can't just remember what happened after midnight, except that Waldemar corrals me and tells me to pull off the stunt at ten o'clock. He explains the details, but I only hears half of it, 'cause Hoodoo is trying to tell me something about a mosquito that bit him when he was at the North Pole.

Dirty and Big Foot are trying to sing something about a wild Irish rose and Buck Masterson is standing on the bar, trying to nominate a Populist for president. We all voted for Buck's candidate, I remember that much, and then me and Dirty starts home, amid much applause.

Across the street the Cross J quartet is singing—

"Jee-e-e-roo-o-o-sa-a-a-lem, Jee-e-e-roo-o-o-sa-a-a-lem, lee-e-e-ft up your voice and see-e-e-ng."

And Judge Steele is orating about—

"—and in the glorious land of our forefathers, where the—the—sun never sets and the—the——"

"Ike," says Dirty, "a man is of few days and full of trouble, but right now I'm a mockin'-bird, with spreadin' pinions and a dazzlin' top-knot. I may die tomorrow, but right now I'm a feathered songster, light of heart and sound of limb. O death, where is thy stinger?"

"The devil has it on the grindstone, Dirty," says I, "and by ten o'clock tomorrow she'll be sharper than a serpent's tooth."

THE next morning we sure slept peacefully, while Magpie goes uptown. He's one of the leading lights, as usual. I reckon it's about nine o'clock when me and Dirty gets something to eat. Dirty is a danged long ways from being a mocking-bird. We can't eat. Maybe it's from looking too much into the future, but I think it's from looking too much into the bottom of a glass.

"If they sees us before we gets them broncs, Waldemar's moving-pitcher is going to be a failure," says I, as we puts on our own clothes, after soaking them beards loose.

"Waldemar?" says Dirty. "My gosh, Ike, you are getting temperamental, like a regular primmydonner. His pitcher a failure? What's his danged pitcher beside my breath of life? If them or'nary saddle-slickers see us before we reach them broncs—Waldemar gets a regular necktie pitcher. They'll hang us to that tree right near Sam Holt's porch, Ike."

"That's too bad, Dirty. Where'll we go if we get away with it?"

"There yuh are!" wails Dirty, flopping his arms. "No place to go."

"Well, we've got to go, anyway; so it might as well be now."

We went out of there and sneaked up on the town of Piperock, like it was a wild thing. Maybe that statement ain't far wrong. We crawls in behind Buck's place, and gets behind a pile of cord-wood. Me and Dirty has both got watches. Mine says ten minutes to ten, and Dirty's says fifteen minutes after ten.

"Mine's right," says Dirty, positive-like. "That watch ain't lost a second in two years. I can correct the sun with that watch, yuh betcha. We're late!"

"Yuh can't beat a Swiss movement," says I, "and that's the kind mine is. It is now ten minutes of ten."

"You're crazy, Ike. Lemme tell yuh something about this—huh—listen to your watch and see if she's runnin'."

"It ain't," says I, after listening. "I forgot to wind it last night."

"Me, too," says Dirty. "My——, we're in an awful fix."

Comes a few yells and a few shots out on the street and then the clatter of six-shooter explosions.

"The celebration is on," says I. "It was due to start at ten o'clock. Let's take a chance. I hope to gosh them broncs are there for us." I takes my life in one hand, a six-shooter in the other and leads the way. There's more than two broncs at the rack, but there ain't no time to figure out ownership, et cettery. There's considerable humanity in sight.

"Take that gray one, Dirty," says I, and then I happens to think that we ain't figured out who is to go inside the bank.

"Wait a minute," says I. "Do you go inside or do I, Dirty?"

"It makes no difference who goes in, Ike. We'll be deader than —— in about three minutes anyway. You go in, will yuh?"

"A-a-a-board!" says I, and hops on to that mouse-colored bronc, which looks like it might go as far and fast.

Somehow I don't no more than hook the right stirrup before I realizes that I've made a mistake. I hears Dirty sort of hiccup a curse, and I'm betting that he has the same thoughts. I don't know about that mouse-colored bronc going fast and far, but I sure know it went high. Also, I soon realized that my saddle wasn't cinched tight. Every time we went high and handsome I can feel the slack in that cinch and it makes me nervous.

"Git to —— out of the way!" I hears Dirty yelp, and into me comes that gray bronc, sunfishin' like forked lightning and whistling like a scared buck. It's about sixty feet across that street to the front of the bank. Know how long it took us to get there? I ain't there yet, if you're curious to know, and this happened a long time ago.

But Dirty got there. Yessir, he got there. At the edge of the sidewalk his cinch busted and he went right in through one of the front windows. He went in feet first, into the window with the sign painted on it, and he stopped with one leg through the cashier's window and the other leg waving for help.

My bronc stopped bucking long enough for me to see all that and then we turns right around—me and that high-minded piece of deviltry—and we bucked straight for Buck Masterson's saloon. There's a big crowd there, and they sure give us room. Some danged fool must 'a' tried to kill that bronc, but missed and one bullet burned my ear, and the other peeled my knuckles on my left hand. Yes, we went in. By that time the cinch is back in the bronc's flanks, and I'm riding wild and free on its rump, with the saddle going further back all the time.

I didn't dare to fall off, so I done my dangdest. I got a view of scared faces as we made a mulligan of a perfectly healthy poker game and then I went up and jammed my head through the bale of a hanging-lamp, and took it with us, hanging around my neck.

The back door was partly open and we took it away, hinges and all, and then we're out in the open again, with Piperock, et cettery, howling in our rear. I banged the bronc with my hat and swung him back toward the street, where I runs into Dirty, backing across the street, shooting every direction. I skids that bronc to a standstill, and yells—

"Get up behind me!"

Dirty stubs his heel and falls down and danged near shot me. Then he gets to his feet and runs up to me.

"Get on behind you?" he yells. "How in —— can I? You're as far back as you can get! I'll get on in front."

Dirty got on. The first jump that bronc made landed him up on its neck, where he locks his legs around under its jaws and away we went, me way back on its rump and him almost on its head, while Piperock fired salutes and cheered in a loud voice.

We turned a corner and bucked around and around until we slammed up against the jail, where my cinch slid down around the bronc's hind legs and I got kicked in the belly with both hind feet. Then the bronc whirled sideways, and slammed Dirty against the corner of the building. He just lets loose and drops like a suit of clothes, while the bronc whistles again and hits for the open country.

I ain't got no ambition left, but I've got sense enough to throw the saddle and Dirty Shirt Jones inside the jail, and then fall in after him. I kicked the door shut, but Piperock cometh not. There ain't no sign of pursuit. Pretty soon Dirty's lips open and he begins singing:

"— le-e-e-ft up your voice and see-e-e-e-ng. Ho-o-o-o-o-sa-a-na-a——"

"Shut up!" I croaks. "You ain't dead—yet."

HE SETS up and licks his lips while he feels of his head.

"What did yuh say?" he asks, weak-like.

"I said, you ain't dead."

"Feller, there's a lot of things that you don't know. Where are we?"

"In the jail."

"Thank the Lord! This is better than I expected. What are we charged with?"

"How much did yuh get in the bank?"

"There wasn't anybody there," he wails. "I left one boot. It hung in the cashier's window and I didn't have time to get it loose. How did we get here?"

I told him all I knew about it, and he marvels exceedingly.

"We obtained money under false pretenses, Ike," says he. "We agreed to rob a bank and there wasn't nobody to hold up."

"He agreed to plant a couple of horses for us," says I, "and he either has a danged poor idea of what a feller rides to a bank-robbery or we picked the wrong steeds."

"Prognostications don't alleviate the crack in my head," says Dirty. " 'Pears to me that my brain is runnin' out."

"Cast aside all fear," says I. "You never could hit that hard. I've got a splintered wish-bone and my stummick has been turned wrong side out. What will we do next, Dirty?"

"Get away from here," says Dirty, which shows that his brains ain't leaking to no great extent.

"How?" I asks. "Looks to me like this quiet little jail is about the only safe place for me and you."

"Well, why in —— don't somebody come along and chide us?" complains Dirty, nervous-like. "It ain't like Piperock to do things like this, Ike. Why don't they kill us and have it over with?"

"Want to die, feller?" I asks. "Pinin' away for death, are yuh?"

"No, I ain't, Ike, but if I've got to die—hurrah for ——! Who's afraid of fire?"

"Shall we sneak back to the shack and get our disguises, Dirty?"

"Not me! If I'm goin' to die, good. I'll die as Dirty Shirt Jones, not as a buzzard-headed bug-hunter who is lookin' for somethin' that crawled away and died a million years ago."

"Well, what yuh goin' to do, Dirty? Figure a little, can't yuh?"

"Figgers be ——! I'm to camp right here until dark, or until some figger of vengeance cometh along and herds me hence. *Sabe?* Give yourself up, go out and get shot, choke yourself to death with your own fair hands—do what you think best, Ike, but old man Jones' little fair-haired child is goin' inside a nice cool cell and sleep off a headache."

"I can't do nothin' but foller yuh," says I, sad-like.

"Your attachment for me is sweet," says he. "I'm all choked up with e-motion, and if I didn't feel so bad I would cry."

Sometimes I wonder who left that quart of hooch under that bunk. We moved the bunk over, so nobody could see us from the sheriff's office, and there she stood, brave and bold. Me and Dirty surrounds it, inhales the odors of Araby, originated in Kentucky and fixed with equal parts of alkali water, copperas, chewing-tobacco and coal-oil, for the consumption of Piperock's leading citizens.

Then we humps up on the bunk and wishes each other a great deal of pleasure in the future. I reckon we done a lot of wishin'. I dreamed of a whole danged string of wishes hanging on a line like laundry out to dry, and when I woke it was dark. Dirty Shirt sounds like a dry saw going through a greasewood butt. I'm about to wake him up, when I hears voices. I jabs my heel into Dirty's shins, and he sets up like one of them mechanical toys.

"Yeah, and I hope yuh gets ninety-nine years and the balance of your life," we hears Scenery Sims saying in his rusty voice. "I'm goin' to put yuh in and then I'm goin' up-town and tell all about it. Some of them snake-hunters think I'm no good as a sheriff, but I gets my man."

"Some old lady must 'a' got drunk and fell down and busted her leg," says Dirty in a hoarse whisper. "Hear that woodchuck peep?"

The door of the cell is yanked open, and two men comes inside. Me and Dirty ain't ready for to be locked in, so as they comes in we goes out. Scenery stands there in the dark, sort of stiff-like. Dirty Shirt lights a match and holds it up. I hears Scenery give a gasp and then the match went out. Then his gun falls on the floor.

I feels two men slip past us in the dark, but I don't reckon that Scenery heard 'em. He moved over the table, knocked the lamp-chimney on the floor, and then managed to light the rest of the lamp. He squints at us, and then goes over to the cell, where he peers inside. Then he sets down in a chair and stares at us. We don't say a word, but we're dang near bustin' inside. Pretty soon Scenery gets up, like a feller walking in his sleep, and goes inside and pulls the door shut after himself.

"I—I don't know," he squeaks in a whisper, staring at us through the bars. "I ain't felt good for a week—dang it! Seein' spots in front on my eyes. It sure is —— to see things thisaway. Must be my stummick."

Dirty stepped over, blowed out the light and we went outside.

"Where to?" I asks.

"Any civilized port," says Dirty.

"Somewhere, Ike, there must be a place where a feller can use up the rest of his misspent life without hidin' behind a stump every time a human bein' shows up."

"We've got to get transportation," says I. "Let's go boldly and take a horse per each from the tie-rack, and go hence rapidly."

There's a crowd in front of Sam Holt's place. Me and Dirty went right to the rack, picked a likely looking bronc per each and got aboard, minus saddles and with nothing on their hammer-heads but hackamores and hair.

Man, I thought that mouse-colored animile could do everything in the book, but this long-legged roan proved to me that my other mount was peckin' along in the kindergarten class.

HIGH and mighty we went. We changed ends, sunfishin' and worm-fencin', but Ike Harper didn't pull leather—'cause there wasn't any; but he sure did anchor himself to that bronc's mane with both hands, got a toe-holt under each shoulder and rode regardless of sun, moon, or tide.

I gets a glimpse of Dirty Shirt Jones ahead of me, and I'd tell a man Dirty is high above that animile's back, the same of which ain't healthy to nervous systems nor stummicks.

Into that crowd we went, ——ity blip. I got a rope under my chin, the same of which cut off my wind. Somebody got one arm around my neck and seems to caress me, and then I'm out in the open, far from the maddening crowd. I manages to get a breath, shoves the encircling arm from around my neck and finds that there's two of us.

I'm all mixed up in a rope. Out of the dark comes another rider, just as my bronc gets hoppled in this danged rope, and turns a handspring. This other horse goes over the top of us, and as far as I'm concerned the earth and sky have met.

Later on I removes the veil and comes back to material things. All is dark and dreary. I hears Dirty singing, soft and low—

"I sa-a-a-a-w the-e-e-e new Jee-e-e-ru-u-u-u-sa-a-a-lem—" and on every word he quavers like some one was shaking his soul.

"——!" says I. "I went further back than that, Dirty. I saw the old town."

"—le-e-e-e-e-e-ft up your voice and see-e-e-ng," wails Dirty.

"I ain't got none to lift!" I yells, and Dirty stops. Then he says—

"Ike, I—I feel that my days are numbered."

"Mine too—thirteen," says I, and just then we hears a faint voice saying:

"O-o-o-oh! O-o-o-oh!"

"Does your horse talk English, Ike?" whispers Dirty, and just then a dim figure reels up to us and sets down. It's still got some rope around its neck. We peers at it, and then Dirty scratches a match. It's Waldemar, wearing a half-inch rope for a necktie. He was the man I picked up on my way through the crowd.

"Waldemar," says Dirty, "we welcome you to our graveyard."

He wheezes for a moment and then manages to croak:

"Take that money back! Take it back!"

"Back to the bank," he wheezes, when we don't say anything. "They—they was hanging me, bub-because I—I told 'em it was just a picture stunt. Take the money back!"

"Way around 'em, Shep," gasps Dirty. "We didn't get no money. Dang it, there wasn't anybody in the bank!"

"Don't say that," wails Waldemar. "I seen you. I got a hundred feet of the best hold-up on earth, and they were going to hang me."

"But we didn't rob the —— bank!" I yowls.

Waldemar is silent for a while and then he says, weary-like—

"Well, somebody did."

"I dimly remember tellin' Big Foot and Hoodoo what we was goin' to do," says Dirty, sad-like. "That must 'a' been them two that Scenery brought to jail."

Me and Dirty gets to our feet. My feet don't line up good, but I'm too good to lay down and quit.

"We'll just walk," says Dirty, sad-like; "just walk and walk until we finds the place which is farthest from Piperock, and then we'll beg, borrow or steal some broncs and keep on goin'."

"How about me?" wails Waldemar.

We stops and looks at him, kinda wondering-like.

"I must go back and get my film and camera before I leave," says he, apologetic-like. "Then where shall I go?"

"Do just as yuh please," says Dirty, "but as far as me and Ike Harper are concerned, all things bein' equal, you can take your —— creepin' tintypes and go plumb to ——!"

We pilgrims away in the darkness, two sufferin' souls, holding hands that our feet may keep pointing ahead. We're in no shape to walk and Dirty says:

"Slow up, can't yuh? They're lookin' for Big Foot and Hoodoo, not us. Scenery likely thinks he's got snakes. Don't go so fast, yuh——"

"Sa-a-a-y!" yowls Waldemar, far away. "They made me tell who done it."

We didn't answer him. Dirty said—

"My ——, ain't yuh got no speed a-tall, Ike?"

FOND OF MEDALS

by H. P.

THE giving of medals to Indians dates back to the coming of the first Spanish missionaries. As early as 1631 Cardinal Richelieu had some big medals struck off for the Canadian aborigines. Thirty years later the British were distributing their first medals among the Virginia Indians. Queen Anne's likeness on a silver medal was presented to the Five Nations, twenty to each Nation. American-made medals were given by the Quakers, also by Sir William Johnson.

The Northwestern Indians received medals in 1778 in return for their allegiance to the British during the Revolution. The United States gave three sizes of medals at the close of the 1812 War. The United States also gave medals when peace treaties were signed.

Explorers took a generous supply with them. The different fur companies in this country and Canada also gave medals. Among the western Indians, during the height of the Trans-Mississippi fur trade, some bitterness was occasioned among the tribes because men who were not renowned in war, nor elevated to the office of chief, were selected by the well-meaning but ignorant Washington officials and returned to their tribes laden with medals.

In some instances the genuinely big men of a tribe refused to wear medals when receiving them. The Hudson's Bay Fur Company's factors not only gave medals, but utilized crude prints, such as were turned off in England for children. Henry, in his travels, found many Crees in the far North who proudly displayed the prints. Amatory braves wore one showing a jolly tar embracing his sweetheart. Warriors wore the picture of a soldier. And so on.

Not only were these prized for being decorative, but were even more important as big medicine.

The Torch-Bearers*

A Four-Part Story Conclusion

by
HUGH
PENDEXTER

Author of "The Road to El Dorado," "The Floating Frontier," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

THE "Swamp-Fox," General Marion, was baffling the British troops in South Carolina during the doubtful days of the Revolution. I, James Lance, was sent by my uncle David Macson to take money to our kinsmen the Macsons of the backwoods. Uncle David was a Tory and our kinsmen rebels. I was neutral.

Uncle David got me a pass through the British lines. In the British camp I came upon soldiers preparing to whip a half-witted youth. The victim was a native of the woods, and I thought of a plan to use him on my mission to my kinsmen.

"Let me have the boy as a guide," I demanded, and after much wrangling the officer in command permitted the boy to go with me.

The half-wit guided me to the cabin of Ellis Ambros, an old Tory. There we met four of Ganner's "Regulators," a lawless mounted band hostile to both rebels and loyalists. In a skirmish Ambros in the cabin and I outside killed three and the other galloped away. My half-wit guide disappeared after the fight.

Ambros directed me to the cabin of Angus Macson. There I met Big Simon, Angus' boorish son, and my pretty cousin, Elsie Macson. They all regarded me suspiciously and expressed their contempt of Uncle David. They were disgusted at my neutrality in the struggle between Whig and Tory. Big Simon and I even had a fist-fight.

They accepted the money and put me up grudgingly for the night. In the morning I rode away with my pretty cousin Elsie as my guide.

ELSIE conducted me to General Marion's camp, where I met the Swamp-Fox himself. I found him more sympathetic toward my neutrality than the other rebels.

On leaving the camp I met my former half-wit guide riding madly. I stopped him and discovered that the half-wit was the pretty Elsie in disguise. She was pursued by a troop of British soldiers. We had no chance to escape. I quickly gave her one of my two passes through the British lines before we were surrounded. Even with my passes our posing as British spies gained us little, for Captain Tickridge of the soldiers forced us to accompany him along the Georgetown trail.

We stopped at Ellis Ambros' cabin and there the soldiers discovered that Elsie was a woman. I declared that I was Major Wemyss of his Majesty's troops. Our position was desperate. Then came the sound of hoofs, and Captain Harrison of the Tories rode up with his detachment. He said that Major Wemyss was following. The major had been ambushed by rebels.

In the excitement Elsie and I fled for our lives. The rebels attacked our captors and we were free to escape. I rode to Charleston and Elsie returned to her own people.

On my journey I blundered into a band of Ganner's Regulators. They held me for ransom in a cabin. In the cabin I stumbled on to Ellis Ambros, who was hiding there, and we escaped together. Ambros was spying on Ganner to settle old scores.

I reached Charleston and there found the town aroused at my disloyalty to the Crown. News of my posing as Major Wemyss had arrived ahead of me, and my uncle was terrified. My friends rallied to my aid, but I was arrested and held for trial.

Lieutenant Drance, a close Tory friend of Major Wemyss, arrived in Charleston just as my friends completed arrangements for my escape. I left the prison and fled to my uncle's house. Again Elsie Macson had deceived the loyalists. "Lieutenant Drance" was Elsie in disguise.

Elsie and I escaped together and joined General Marion's forces. I renounced my neutrality and swore fidelity to the Whigs. Hot fighting began shortly after my arrival. Big Simon Macson fell in the battle; but in the fight he had killed my old enemy, Captain Tickridge.

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* *"The Torch-Bearers," Copyright 1921, by Hugh Pendexter.*

CHAPTER XI

THE WORST BLOW OF ALL

THERE followed a period of inactivity with many of the men returning to their homes. Among these were the Macsons, father and sons; and old Angus' head was bowed as he rode from camp. He was thinking of Simon, I knew. Before the Macsons departed a man joined us, or rather was brought in by one of the scouts, who impressed Angus and me unfavorably. He was well mounted and armed, and claimed to have come from the Chewar district, and told some blood-curdling stories about the war of extermination being waged there.

He seemed to be a fellow of considerable wit and assurance and was trying to locate the camp when picked up by the scout. He gave his name as Samuel Threll, but names counted little among us if a man could shoot and ride. In the brigade were several questionable characters. These either were ignorant of, or did not care for, the decencies of war. They needed a strong hand and Marion was the man to discipline them.

Some were wofully ignorant of the cause of the war. Those showing themselves to be beasts by instinct and attracted to the brigade by the hopes of plunder tarried only long enough to resaddle and clear out. If we heard of any depredations committed by them the general promptly posted notices along the roads to the effect they did not ride with him and that any one was welcome to kill them on sight.

But Threll was not of these types and yet he repelled me. He did his duties quietly and efficiently and was almost at once made a sergeant. So far as outward appearances could reveal anything he would make an excellent soldier. Yet the moment I clapped eyes on him I disliked him and, so I learned, did Angus. Tom and Dick thought him a fine chap.

Threll's gaze was not a bit furtive and yet was continually roving. Had he been a backwoods boy I would have said he was unused to seeing armed men in any numbers. He quickly proved to be attentive and prompt and had a quiet way of authority with the men. It was just before going away that old Angus remarked to me—

"The new man acts like he knew his business and——"

I waited respectfully and, as he continued silent, prompted—

"And, what?"

"And like he knew some other things we'd be interested in if we only knew them."

Angus had come to me to ask me to ride with him to the cabin. I refused because of what the girl had written me. The moment he rode away I was sorry I had not gone with him. It was while in this disturbing frame of mind that I happened to glance up and find Sergeant Threll's eyes focused on me, his gaze too steady to be casual. I sharply asked—

"What are you staring at me for?"

"Sorry, sir. No harm meant," was the humble reply and his gaze dropped.

Then came the daring attempt to capture Colonel Tarleton and all small prejudices and personal matters were ousted from my mind. Cornwallis, enraged at our successes at Tarcote and on the Black Mingo, sent Tarleton to run us down. We knew of the plan before Tarleton left Charleston, the general in some mysterious manner being well informed of the enemy's plans.

Tarleton's legion was at Camden and the general's informant reported the colonel had sent orders for it to march down the Wateree and meet him. Instantly was born in Marion's bold mind the ambitious project of intercepting Tarleton and capturing him and his troop of horse before he could join his main body.

The very simplicity of our plans warranted success. We rode with all haste to the Santee and arranged our ambush in the river-swamp near Nielson's Ferry. We were barely settled to the tedious business of waiting when Shonts came in, his long face scowling, to announce that Tarleton had passed the ferry two days before.

"Sergeant Threll brought in the last report relayed from you, Shonts. Your information as reported by him marked tomorrow morning as the earliest time Tarleton could reach this point," said Marion.

"He didn't git it right," roared Shonts. "You oughter been here two days ago to do any good. That's the word I sent in by him."

"I believe that Threll is a —— rascal!" hotly cried Colonel Horry.

"Possibly," mused Marion. "But profanity won't help any. Send him to me and we'll talk with him."

Eager search was made for the sergeant

but he had disappeared. This stamped him as a spy.

"If we're behind our gentleman we'll see if we can't catch up with him," Marion quietly decided. "Give orders to mount."

The chase commenced with no sparing of horses for our game must be run down before forming a junction with the legion. It was a race between us and the legion. Tarleton ordinarily took his time. If Threll was a spy and could get word of our plan to the colonel the latter would show a swift pair of heels. The legion would move leisurely and we still believed we stood an excellent chance of delivering the masterstroke, a most eloquent reply to his lordship's order for the colonel to "get at Mr. Marion."

Our confidence of overhauling Tarleton was increased by our knowledge of his recent illness. He would need to halt and rest frequently. As we reviewed Threll's absences from camp we arrived at the satisfying conclusion he had had no opportunity to warn Tarleton of our scheme and that his mischief consisted entirely in misquoting Shonts' report.

When we halted that night in a patch of woods our optimism was quite restored. The men were unsaddling and gobbling down their cold rations when a scout reported a strange light beyond the woods and in the direction we had been riding. Even as he announced his discovery the light grew into a glow and by the rapid increase of its brilliancy we knew some buildings must be on fire.

Marion watched it for some moments, then said to Colonel Horry—

"That would be Colonel Richardson's plantation, wouldn't it?"

"I make it that, sir," the colonel replied. "But here comes some one with news."

It was the faithful Shonts and he was exuding curses as he passed through the growth in search of the general. Marion called out—

"This way, Shonts."

"Richardson's plantation fired by Tarleton's legion. Tarleton and his troop are there with the legion. Two field-pieces. That —— Threll's there, too."

"Watch them." Then to Colonel Horry—

"We'll fall back to Jack's Creek."

The fire blazed higher, painting the heavens brilliantly, and we were fortunate in having the cover of the woods. We withdrew in excellent order, although each man's heart was a volcano and his lips hot with oaths against the spy. Apparently Marion accepted the defeat of his plan very philosophically. We retreated expeditiously, for Threll's presence at the Richardson plantation must mean a hot pursuit.

Only the legion's passion for destroying property had prevented us from riding into trouble. We covered the six miles to the creek and fortified ourselves in a wood-yard. In the early dawn a black man rode in to announce Tarleton's entire force was after us. He had received this message from Shonts, who, he said, would soon be in touch with us.

Had it been a detachment we would have waited and given battle. But the ground was not suitable for engaging the legion and the two field-pieces. We abandoned the wood-yard and there began a most furious chase. Tarleton had been urged to "get at" our leader and never had he had such a promising opportunity as now. Tarleton was a bold, smashing campaigner. There was nothing subtle about his work. He always had had the preponderance in numbers and never hesitated to send his men in.

He was held to be his lordship's best man at the business and yet after all his efforts Marion was in the country and audacious enough to attempt his capture. He must have known that the present affair was pivotal in his career. The general also appreciated the desperation of our position if overtaken and quickly changed the line of our retreat.

WE ENTERED an almost impassable region, consisting of deep swamps and thick timber. Men who knew the intricacies of the desolate tract led the way. When we drew clear of the abomination we were on the south branch of Black River. Already the general had reconstructed his plans. We did not cross the river, a move that would have assured our safety, but continued down its south bank for ten miles in the hope we might coax Tarleton to send his light horse after us.

Tarleton, however, would not allow any separation of his forces. We finally halted at Benbow's Ferry, where the general was willing to make a stand against the entire strength of the enemy; and this determination although the British post at Kingstree was only ten miles below us. But our position was excellent. It commanded the ford and was backed up by an extensive area of swamp, through which ran several paths, each difficult to follow unless one knew the ground, and each easy of defense against greatly superior numbers.

The general's plan of battle, as briefly related by him to Horry, was to meet the attack with rifle-fire, which was sure to work terrible damage to the legion. He firmly believed the enemy could be repulsed as for once we had plenty of powder and ball. But if this victory be denied us then we were to fall back in three detachments, crossing the swamp and taking toll along the way if pursued.

During the retreat the general believed Tarleton's forces would be split up and could be reduced to numbers which would license us to take the offensive again. Tarleton would be whipped before he fired a gun. Unfortunately for our hopes Tarleton halted when some miles distant and refused to attack. Ever after that, it may be stated, Fortune frowned on him. He left his career behind him when he turned his back on Benbow's Ferry.

If Tarleton had had enough of the game Marion had not. He refused to return to Snow's Island or take on any other enterprise until he had made a smash at his old foe. To attack the legion in the open would be suicide. But no leader excelled the general in his technique in cutting off the tail of a superior force, making his kill and rushing prisoners away, before the head of the column could realize what had happened. So when the scouts, including Shonts, began arriving and reporting the legion was retiring, we sallied out to work some mischief. This was the morning of our second day at the ferry.

By a barely discernible path we cut across the swamp and went into hiding along the road the king's men would follow. There were some of the younger men who were eager to fire on the main column in an effort to demoralize the whole legion. General Marion did not care to risk a defeat, however. To cut out audaciously a group of prisoners would do more to keep the people's faith alive than any amount of heroic behavior in defeat. So word was passed that not a shot should be fired prematurely.

In crossing the swamp—Ox Swamp, they called it—we had followed the cord of a bow and were in hiding several hours before midday. The sun was directly overhead when the whispered word was passed that the legion was coming. Along they swept, a gallant array, and I know the general must have itched to make a drive at his old antagonist who rode in the middle of his command. Such a maneuver, while it might have resulted in the death of Tarleton, could scarcely have permitted us to take him prisoner and would have engulfed us in no time. The men used their eyes in seeking Threll rather than the colonel, and many bloody oaths were muttered against the fellow.

My dislike for him was based on a different reason. He was obnoxious because he was he, not because he was a spy. Marion's spies were risking their necks in Charleston and sending us news daily. Old Ambros, most active in behalf of the British, was human enough to attempt saving my life for no reason except he was indebted to my uncle. No; Threll would have aroused my antagonism if I had met him in peaceful times.

The two field-pieces passed, then more of the legion, and I was beginning to believe our venture was to end in sight-seeing when the column showed a break. Some fifty men were riding several hundred rods behind the main body. These were our victims.

Marion whispered to Colonel Horry and there was a slight stirring along our line. On they came, riding hard as if to overtake the main body. When fairly abreast of General Marion a shrill whistle rang out. The rifles cracked on either side of me, emptying many a saddle, and the men charged from cover. In a moment the road was filled with a confused mass of cursing, struggling men and rearing horses.

I was behind Colonel Horry and pistoled a dragoon who would have sheared his head off with a broadsword. The next moment a sword was over my head and one of the Witherspoons drove his musket-butt into the fellow's head and I pressed on. General Marion had charged the head of the detached band to turn it back and once I glimpsed him thrusting and parrying with his small sword.

From the rear of the troops our men sent up a tremendous shout and all the fighting-spirit seemed to desert the enemy, and everywhere the survivors were throwing down their arms and yelling for quarter. Marion rode Ball through the groups of combatants, restraining the blood-mad from butchering those who stood empty-handed.

His whistle sounded the retreat and it was timely; for Tarleton at last was sensing the situation and his entire command was doubling back and roaring down the road to crush us. We had no chance to assemble prisoners, but in falling back to cover the men did carry with them several whom I took to be officers.

Through the woods and back into the swamp we poured. Tarleton's troopers rode valiantly into the woods but balked at the edge of the swamp. They feared more tricks. I rode in the middle of the column while we were passing across the neck of the swamp, and once we struck firm ground I drew aside to fall in with the rear-guard. Only a few couples passed me before a husky voice exclaimed:

"—— my blood! Old Jim!"

I looked twice into the swamp-stained face of a much disheveled officer before I recognized my old friend Captain Posby.

I clasped his hand and he wearily informed me—

"Chap on my right is twisting my arm off."

He referred to Shonts and I ordered the scout back to keep tabs on the pursuit if there should be any.

"We'll l'arn 'em what whang-doodles is, leftenant," he cried as he dived into the woods to watch the enemy.

"Captain Posby, who would have dreamed of such a meeting!" was all I could say.

"None of us when they had you tucked up in the provost's prison," he ruefully replied. "Seen Masters?"

"Good Heavens, no! Was he in the fighting?"

"Three of your men dead in the road says he was," was the proud reply. "What a devilish disgrace! Picked off like ripe cherries. Curse the luck, Jim, but if I've got to be here I'm glad to see you. Your General Marion is a hellion for gall. By every military precept he couldn't cut us off like that without being caught by Colonel Tarleton."

"Old friend, you did me many a good turn when I was laid up in gaol——"

"Pooh! Visited you while drunk, and sent in some rations. Still, Jim, there is a favor——"

"Name it!"

"Fix it so I can be paroled and get back to England. If held a prisoner I'd die."

"General Marion will arrange it all right. I've already told him how much I owe to you and Masters. Do they talk of me and Drance in town?"

"Ah, that young Drance! The make-believe! What a popular hanging he could furnish the town! If ever he comes to Charleston again while his lordship is there! Such stories are whispered about him! The *Royal Gazette* hasn't printed a word. Some idiots even say he was a *woman!*"

"You may meet him before you return to Charleston. You're sure to like him."

"I'm sure to want to wring his neck, the insolent young bantam!" cried Posby. "—— his fine airs! And worst of all he fooled us! Do you know, Jim, it's always been a mystery to Masters and me how you got out of that cell."

"A bit of luck, a bit of pluck—on some one else's part."

"Pluck? Bah! We speak of a woman's pluck. Wish I knew how old Masters is."

"I always wish him well. He was my good friend once."

"Is now. Just because you fight a man is no reason for disliking him. That's the only trouble with war. You can't pick the fellows you'd like to fight against. I say, Jim, here comes that wild creature that twists my arm. ——! Tell him to keep his distance."

SHONTS did not offer to stop, being bound for the head of the column to report. In passing me he gleefully cried out:

"Old Tarleton's got his belly filled. Nary a man chasing us. Whoopee!"

"Beastly enthusiastic," growled Posby. "Wonder what the fellows back in town will say about my being nabbed in this —— simple manner! I could have fought it out till I was downed for good. Five seconds more would have made another dead Posby. I surrendered, but if any one says I lacked spirit——"

"You'd be a fool to have your head bashed in when you can be a prisoner and get your parole and go home and fight in some other part of the empire."

"Oh, of course. Quite obvious," he

sighed. "But we should have gobbled this ragged mob up. Scarcely sportsmanship to take such a devilish advantage. We'd been scouring the country for your general and riding in mud and snakes up to our stirrups. We were coming in to report and have a sleep. *Plop!* Bushes alive, our men dead— 'Pon my honor it was like a dream. I don't feel I'm awake yet."

"General Marion wants Lieutenant Lance forward," a voice shouted up the line. The call was passed on and I spurred ahead.

"Don't leave me with these cursed arm-twisters," cried Posby.

"Follow behind me. The general probably wants to know about you."

We pressed ahead and as the column halted were soon up with Marion and his officers.

The general gave Posby a quick look, then said to me:

"A British officer dying wishes to speak with you. We did not know he was seriously wounded until he fell from his horse. He heard your name and asked for you—a very brave fellow."

The group parted and my heart ached as I beheld the pale face of Masters. He was lying on the ground with his head propped up by Colonel Horry's knee; and it needed no man of pills and physic to see he was in a bad way.

"Lance," he whispered as I dropped beside him and took his hand. "You cut it lucky. Glad you made it— What! Posby here! Beau Posby nabbed? Now I don't feel so cheap. My papers in Charleston, Pos. You know what to do with them. I owe two pounds at the tavern—Jim, I'm glad I didn't happen to do for you. You'd be mighty pleasant company to take along, though."

He was silent for nearly a minute and my efforts to talk were bungling. Then his pallid face screwed up in a semblance of his old whimsical smile, and he whispered—

"Wonder if they'll let me play billiards over there?"

I was sniveling and Posby's face was distorted with grief. We tried to reach the deaf ears with a last farewell, but the blue eyes were set and staring at the sky. Suddenly he turned on his side and came up on his elbow, and in a voice surprizingly strong for a man all but dead, cried out—

"Long live his gracious Majesty!"

And with this salute to King George and death he dropped back and entered the presence of that King who is always gracious to simple soldiers. Marion and his men bowed bared heads, not in honor of the Hanoverian but in homage to a true man.

As there was no pursuit the command swept on, leaving Posby and me and two men to bury poor Masters. After marking the grave so we might find it in better times, we rode after the column. Posby was downcast and not inclined to talk. He and Masters had been very close friends in both merrymaking and fighting. It was the second tragedy of the war to touch me beneath the surface, Big Simon's death being the first.

Overtaking the command, I presented Posby to Marion and explained his desire to be paroled. The general was very courteous as both Elsie and I had reported most favorably about the dear fellow.

"We'll arrange it formally after we reach my camp, Captain Posby. I shall be glad to convenience you. If all his Majesty's officers bore such good repute with my men the war would be confined to legitimate killing."

"You can't expect me to acquiesce in any criticism of my fellow officers," Posby stiffly replied.

"Never, captain. You shall partake of the evening meal with me and become better acquainted with Colonel Horry, and we'll talk over your affairs."

I messed apart with Conyers and M'Cottry, and while making preparations for the night—which consisted largely of finding a smooth spot for my blanket—Posby joined me. He was much perplexed and as we sprawled on our blankets before a small fire he said:

"Beastly poor form to discuss one's food when one's eating from another's bounty. But your general. Is that a sample of his table fare?"

"What did you have?" I inquired, well acquainted with his love for good cheer.

"Some cold potatoes with their service-jackets on. A heavy, a devilishly heavy sort of corn bread. My blood! If ever you run out of musket-balls use some of that bread! Then Colonel—a rapping good chap—found a bowl of cursed porridge as a treat for me."

"All that?" I lamented. "My star was not shining tonight. I'm never asked when they have something extra."

"Eh? Extra? Good ——! What did *you* have?"

"Only the cold potatoes and journey-cakes. So the colonel treated you to porridge——"

He frowned at the fire and remained silent for some minutes; then announced:

"It's all settled about my parole, but I must go to your camp first. Until then I'm in your charge. This ends me in America—back to Charleston to get poor old Masters' papers, then for England on the first ship out. That porridge. I spoke like a —— hound— It was good porridge."

In the morning we crossed the Kingstree road, half-expecting to be attacked, and took the shortest route to Lynch's Creek. Posby and I brought up the tail of the column and were poor company for each other. He was thinking of his military disaster and I was brooding over Elsie. Suddenly I decided I would get leave and ride to the Macson cabin. I explained to my friend:

"I think I'll call on my cousin, the young woman I helped to escape from Tickridge. I would like to have you go with me. I'll fix it with General Marion. We'll be entirely alone."

"I must get to Charleston and back home and be assigned to service. But this seems to be our last throw together, Jim. ——! I'll go along with you. Fix it."

The matter was easily arranged. General Marion had read Posby's true character almost at a glance. He advised the captain to wear a plain dragoon cloak to cover up his uniform a bit and ordered me to report at Snow's Island with the captain within five days. In dismissing me he said:

"Tell Mistress Elsie our camp is quite dull without her. I shall expect the Macsons, two of them at least, to return with you. There's work ahead."

I do not believe I would have planned a visit to the cabin if not for Posby's company. Her message, expressing a desire to avoid me, would have kept me away. Posby was an excellent excuse in salving over my pride and in catering to my heart. I told myself that the captain and I were paying the visit to the father and brothers. I did not stop to consider what old Angus' reception of the hated uniform might be. So the two of us dropped from the column and swung off to the left. I pointed out to Posby the spot where I had met Captain Tans and cheated him out of whipping a half-wit.

"Too much whipping and burning. Too little coming to honest blows," growled Posby.

NEXT we came to Ellis Ambros' cabin, or rather what was left of it; for it had been fired. I have no doubt Tickridge in his blind rage placed the torch. I sought to expel the cloud from my companion's face by describing my adventures at the cabin with Ganner's men. He showed no interest until I mentioned the dogs. Then he was bristling with questions as to their strain, and what not, and was much disgruntled at my ignorance.

"I've seen old Ambros. If I'd known about his dogs I'd have treated him with more decency. At least with enough to find out what breed his man-eaters are."

"He's been very useful to Cornwallis," I remarked.

"Oh, aye. But that doesn't make him popular with the army. Lots of foolish chaps like myself in the army who can't fancy a man who turns against old neighbors and lays them by their heels. Fighting one's neighbors is good sport at times, but this sneaking in and out and whispering, whispering, and then some poor devil's cabin goes up in flames and his crops are ruined— None of us in Charleston would give the old beast a civil day even if he could get his lordship's ear when we couldn't get into the anteroom. Brutally lonesome country in these parts."

"It's very quiet just now," I admitted. "Did they make much of my escape from gaol?"

"——'s peace! Such fault-finding! Such overhauling! A Sergeant Newt came near to swinging on a charge of having helped you. He was saved by that imbecile Tickridge. There was some talk about Masters and me and a few of our friends going to see you. Ended quite right, though."

Now he was embarrassed, showing he had broached something he did not care to go into. I became very stern and insistent and got enough out of him to permit me to fit the whole thing together. He and Masters had been in for a wigging, and were fortunate to escape with being assigned to border duty.

"My return to Charleston won't be very

lively nor pleasant," he ruefully admitted.

I asked about my uncle and was pleased to learn he was held in the old esteem and that all loyalists sympathized with him for having such a brute of a nephew. At this point Posby smiled broadly and remarked:

"Poor form to be hobnob with a chap who'll beat up his old uncle, eh? Ah, but he's an old fox! No offense. But the old gentleman is slick. How Buck Masters laughed when we were told about your brutal behavior toward him, and how you robbed him! Poor old Buck Masters! God rest his soul."

He was back in the dumps again, and I spoke of the genuine Lieutenant Drance's arrival to divert his thoughts.

With much gusto he described Drance's appearance at headquarters and the caustic reminder that the uniform had been there before. The poor fellow was fairly abused for having been captured and so successfully impersonated. A hundred pounds was offered for the bogus Drance, dead or alive.

"I think I can fix it so you will meet the imitation Drance," I said.

He grew red with fury and vowed:

"If you do, Jim, I'll pull his nose! ——! It would be a slap in the face every time I set eyes on the young reprobate."

"Pulling noses is awkward business, but it's a matter for you to decide. Anyway, I believe I can give you the chance."

"Then don't blame me for what happens," he roared.

I dropped it and passed on to Tickridge and his finish.

"This Big Simon must be an amazing brute. I'd like to see him," he eagerly declared.

"I should have told you that the poor fellow is dead. The young woman we go to pay our respects to is his sister."

And I described how Simon died and was buried in his victim's coat and cloak.

"Cursedly pleasing sportsmanship when he threw down his arms and went at Tickridge bare-handed," he applauded.

He developed a faint interest in the sister because of the brother's prowess. He assumed she was a brawny, masculine type and I allowed him to remain in this error, anticipating that her dainty person and the avowal she was the bogus Drance would leave him thoroughly nonplused. We came to the crossing and followed the flat stones to the opposite bank, and I was showing him where I had concealed my passes on my first visit to the region when our talk was interrupted by the galloping of a horse up the trail.

"It'll be the girl by the way the nag travels," I warned, my heart thumping worse than it did when I charged Tarleton's men. I began to wonder if I hadn't made a mistake in coming. She might flout me and put me to shame before Posby.

"Whoever it is the horse is running away," sharply spoke up Posby, turning his horse so as to block the trail. Horse and rider now burst into view, and my heart ceased its tumult and became a clump of ice. It was young Tom Macson, and his eyes were set and staring like a madman's, and at every stride he senselessly belabored his tacky with a stout cudgel. The poor beast already was in a lather and must have dropped dead inside another quarter of a mile.

I ranged my horse in front of Posby's and yelled for the boy to stop. He did not see nor hear until almost upon us and even then he tried to go around me. It was not until I grasped his horse by the bridle and he had lifted a pistol by the barrel to beat me over the head that recognition shone into his eyes.

"Cousin Jim! Then you've heard!"

"Heard? Heard what?" I whispered, my mouth dry with terror.

"Daddy's dead!" he choked. "But he took three of 'em with him. Dick's dead or dying! Oh, my God!"

And his arm went across his eyes and he broke down and blubbered as if his heart would break. Captain Posby fiercely signaled me to let him alone, and for several minutes, each an eternity, I waited for the dreaded climax of his terrible story.

"They jumped us while we was eating," he hoarsely gasped. "I sat next the door and just got a glimpse of them and thought they was some of Marion's new men. Feller looked like Threll was with them. Then I got a crack that laid me out. When I woke up Daddy was dead and poor Dick was dying, the cabin was burning. Dicky told me what had happened. And poor Elsie—poor little sis!"

Now I could not wait; and before he could collapse again I had him by the shoulders and was shaking him violently.

"And Elsie?" I shouted. "What of her?"

"G-gone!" he stuttered as I rocked his head back and forth.

"Gone? Where? With whom?" I thundered.

"With them—Ganner's men. They thought me dead——"

Ganner. Why could not the poor child have found a bullet and have fallen by the side of her old father? I heard Captain Posby talking, not drawling, but speaking with clipped words that made for brevity and action. Under his sharp prodding Tom had no chance to relapse into mental agony. With jerks of the head or with monosyllables he answered the rapid queries.

"Ride to General Marion. Tell him your story. He will send men. If you kill your horse you'll kill your sister. First, hand over those two pistols. I'm unarmed. Now go and ride decently. Come, Jim, come!"

His peremptory voice aroused me and I began to sense the realities of the situation. As Tom resumed his journey to Snow's Island I made to halt him, but Posby yanked my horse about and in the direction of the cabin, and harshly cried:

"I know everything the poor fellow can tell you. The girl, so far as he knows, is alive——"

"God pity her!"

"—and unhurt. This beastly Ganner will only think of getting back to his hiding-place. The old gentleman has been done in. The other youngster, Dick, may be dead and he may be alive. Lead the way to the cabin. We'll follow those chaps. If the boy doesn't lose his head your General Marion will be swarming up this way to beat —— before sunset."

My head was suddenly filled with a consuming desire for revenge. I took the lead and proved I had not lost my head by the manner in which I favored my horse and coaxed the miles out of him with the minimum loss to his strength. Posby watched me closely and then congratulated me:

"You'll do, Jim. The dead can't be helped, don't need any help; but there's always something we can do for the living. How near the creek would this Ganner person be making his headquarters?"

He had ranged the southern and western parts of the State and this was his first visit to the creek. It was plain to me he was shifting his base to the north, beyond the Pedee. The Chewar district, with its evil reputation for feuds and butcheries, and no-quarter fights between Whig and Tory, would afford him an ideal hiding-place. In all South Carolina there could be no better stamping-ground for a devil of Ganner's occupation.

"He'll make for the Chewar Hill country," I replied.

"Good! If I remember headquarters' maps it's quite a ride. He'll have no time for love-making. He must know this crime will bring your general after him. A body of men can't travel as fast as two men."

"Two men!"

"Don't be an ass! Didn't I borrow two pistols from the young duffer? I'm in your charge. And by the gods when it comes to hunting chaps of this Ganner person's kidney I'll never quit you—I believe I can smell smoke."

IN A few minutes we sighted the smoking ruins. We dismounted by the side of old Angus, who lay on his back near the charred walls, a very peaceful expression on his strong face. His rifle, stock shattered, lay near him. He had been shot through the head and through the body and either of the wounds must have killed him instantly.

Near by were stretched out three rough fellows we identified as being Ganner's men. Their pockets were turned inside out, proving that their comrades, while lacking time to bury them, had taken time to rob them. On one of the dead men Posby found two pistols and a supply of powder and balls and he added these weapons to the brace taken from young Tom.

I spared only a glance for the dead but raised my voice and called Dick by name, giving my own. From a thicket of bushes came a faint response. I ran into the growth and tumbled over the dead body of an outlaw who had pursued the lad to murder him. A few rods farther on I found Dick. He was white from loss of blood, but had managed to tie up his wounds which were in the thigh and side. He was able to talk. Before I could put a question he was explaining:

"Ganner and forty men—did this. Tom knocked cold—Daddy used his rifle like a club— Killed some— I killed one with a table-knife. Got one that dogged me in here—Ganner grabbed Elsie. They tied her to a horse and took her north. Ganner's making for Chewar Hill country—God put speed in your nag's hoofs! If you love sis, don't come back without her."

I ran back to my horse and called on the captain to make haste. He had found a crock and filled it with water and took time to carry it to the wounded youth. I paused only long enough to close old Angus' eyes. He had striven so hard for these new United States it seemed too horrible he should die at the hands of such as Chace Ganner. Posby reappeared and dashed a hand across his eyes.

"You know this cursed trick of reading signs on the ground better than I," he gruffly called out. "So, find the road and we'll take it."

The trail was easy even for a city-dweller to follow as Ganner's men had fled with no attempt to hide their course. It led from the creek toward the Pedee but swung to the north before reaching the river. From then on I knew we should travel parallel to the stream.

"They have between fifty and sixty miles to make and we must overhaul them before they cover more than twenty-five," I told the captain.

"Rapping good! We'll attack on sight, the two of us," cried Posby. "And it'll be devilish fine sportsmanship, Jim."

"Once they reach Chewar Hill only a miracle can save the girl."

"No question about our overtaking the beasts inside of twenty miles," he replied.

The south country proving too hot for him ever since Captain Harrison's attack on his quarters, Ganner must have ridden hard to break across the British lines and make the creek. It stood to reason his horses must be far from fresh. Our mounts had traveled leisurely since their night's rest and were good for many swift miles. The trail led through a desolate country and we saw but few human beings.

Either the occasional cabins were deserted, or their owners fled to the bush on our arriving. Twice we halted and sought to find some one to learn if they had seen the band and the girl. One or two emaciated men after squirrels ducked into cover on sighting us. Three thin, sallow-complexioned women searching for ears of corn in a starved-looking corn-field were more brave or apathetic, for they only straightened their bowed forms and stared at us dully as we reined in and shouted questions to them. We got no response.

Other homesteads had been given over to the flames and presented sickening pictures of desolation. The effect on Posby was visibly depressing, but I was quite accustomed to it. One trace of Ganner's flight, however, shook even my nerves. A dead man and a dead woman, beside a crudely constructed drag, together with the marks of scuffling hoofs, told the gruesome story. Ganner had met or overtaken the unfortunate couple while they were hauling corn home. And he had murdered them for the horse. As the victim's horse was sure to be a bony tacky and not of much account the crime evidenced desperate straits for at least one of the bandits.

"If it can be our blessed luck to kill off some of the devils!" I heard Posby whisper.

We halted only long enough to place the dead at one side of the road, to dump the miserable harvest of corn and pull the drag over the bodies as a temporary protection from four-legged beasts; then we were off again. Late in the afternoon my horse picked up a stone and I dismounted to remove it. Posby, who was ahead, kept on. He had advanced but a short distance when there came the sound of a shot to startle me; and Posby was wheeling about and charging full tilt into the brush.

The shot and his attack were almost simultaneous, revealing how rapidly the good fellow's mind worked when seeking danger. I was in the saddle and racing madly to join him when there came a second shot. Was he done for and had the pursuit devolved upon me, alone? That was the momentous question I was asking myself when Posby reappeared in the road; and he was waving a long rifle.

"Did for the beggar, Jim!" he exulted with more brandishing of the rifle. "Took his gun and munitions."

And he held up a shot-pouch and powder-horn.

"One man?" I asked.

"That's all," he regretted. "Tried to use a knife but I pistoled him neat."

I told him to wait a second and dismounting, crashed into the wood. I feared the dead man might be a patriot, who had glimpsed my friend's hostile uniform. I found the fellow and was positive at the first glance he was one of Ganner's men. I looked more closely and identified him as the fellow Elsie had hit with a rock when we encountered some of the bandits near old Ambros' cabin. His second meeting with the girl had been fatal.

Although I looked about quite carefully I could not find his horse. He had been left behind to watch the back track. How he ever came to miss Posby at such close range and shooting with a rifle was beyond my comprehension. It became clearer to me when I rejoined my impatient friend and beheld a bullet-hole through his hat. Aiming for the head, the motion of the horse had caused the murderer to miss by the narrowest margin.

"Why bother with a dead man when there's more of his kidney waiting to be done?" demanded Posby.

"Six they've already lost on this raid," I checked off. "It's costing Ganner dear."

"They'll lose more now we're hot on the scent," grimly declared Posby.

I spoke of the absence of any horse and expressed my doubt as to the fellow's being left to make any great distance afoot.

"I believe they've camped near here," I said. "That villain was left as an outpost. They can't be far ahead and I only hope they aren't near enough to hear the shots. Wherever they've camped it's sure to be back from the road and well concealed."

"It's excessively considerate of them to give us a chance to catch up. Wouldn't old Buck Masters have liked this sort of a thing!"

CHAPTER XII

MY FRIEND STANDS BY ME

THE conviction grew upon me that the two shots must have been heard and that even now Ganner's men were on their way to investigate. I said as much and insisted we should leave the road. Captain Posby, who would never feel at home in the stealthy rôle of a scout, was very loath to dismount and take to the woods. He had some logic on his side when he argued that my fears might be groundless and that to advance afoot would mean an irretrievable loss of time.

However, he left it for me to decide on the plan we should follow and I found it a terrible responsibility. The very minutes were precious and we could not afford to waste one in needless caution. But if Ganner had camped near, we rode to our death did we press our quest on horseback.

Ganner was too shrewd a campaigner not to have the road well scouted. I weighed the matter carefully and decided my friend's line of thought was prejudiced by his dislike for foot-travel and was influenced by his preference for a direct attack. Subtle methods did not appeal to his blunt, brusk nature. On the other hand my conclusions had something tangible to rest upon; there was the man left without a horse to watch the road.

Even if Ganner would leave a man thus exposed to peril and far removed from the support of his mates, the fellow would never stick to his post once danger threatened. If Ganner had galloped on, purposing to make a night-ride of it, the sentinel left behind would make himself scarce, knowing his leader would never be the wiser. Then there was the condition of the bandits' horses, as indicated by the double murder, committed to obtain one farm tacky. I knew Ganner must be very near and I said to the captain:

"Dismount. We'll take to the brush and keep under cover for a while. We'll soon sight their camp or know it's safe to ride openly."

"The road shows they were riding at a gallop," he protested. "We're safe to follow it a bit farther."

"They were riding at a gallop when they dropped their scout at this point, but darkness will soon prevent our reading their trail. Come on!"

He cursed warmly as I conducted him into the woods and took a course parallel to the road and within a few rods of it. Within ten minutes I had the satisfaction of knowing I had chosen wisely. And it was he—although no woodsman—who first caught the *clumpty-clump* of galloping hoofs. We made our horses fast to a laurel branch and stole to the edge of the highway. It was dusk, but not so thick as to shut out the two figures bobbing down upon us. While some distance away they slowed their gait and seemed to hesitate between coming farther and turning back. Once they halted and one of them whistled.

"They heard the shots," I whispered to the captain. "The camp's close by."

"Exactly. But why don't the beggars come within good pistol-range? This devilish twilight hampers a man."

"On your life no shooting!" I warned. "Make no move till I say the word."

"But they're turning back," he groaned.

"Then we must let them go. Remember it's the girl we're after. Now they halt again. Now they've decided to come a bit farther this way."

The two came on at a walk, whistling softly. When within a dozen feet of us one of them reined in and blasphemed roundly. The other also halted and called the dead man's name. Then he growled—

"Let's go back, Ike."

"Cap'n said to find him and learn what the shots meant, Bill."

"Don't believe there was any shots. I didn't hear any. Anyway, he ain't here."

"He was below this. We ain't rid far 'nough," said Ike.

"——! Want to git back on Lynch's Creek? It was right here he took to the woods."

"It was below this, I tell you. I'm going another quarter," insisted Ike. "Cap'n's mighty bad man when he's mad. He's got one of his devil spells coming on. I heard him laffing in a old woman's voice."

"That's 'cause he's thinking of the girl. Always has them spells when he's caught a likely woman. The Macson girl at that! And won't her Whig friends tear their hair and have fits!"

"What luck can a woman bring? All risk and no pay. Only a fool will bother with women."

"Huh!" snorted the man called Bill. "Sounds like you was finding fault with the cap'n."

The other was silent for a few moments, then softly asked—

"And you're going to tell him that I found fault with him, ain't you, Bill?"

"What put that fool notion into your head, Ike? Me tell on a good old friend!"

"Bill, I'm mighty 'fraid of the cap'n. Bill, you got the notion to blab on me. You got it in your mind, or you wouldn't 'a' spoke of it. What if you happened to speak it in camp so's the cap'n heard you? He shot Slim Ellery for less'n that."

"Darn fool talk, Ike," scoffed Bill. "We're friends. Ain't I always stood with the boys?"

"You used to," was the slow reply. "But the boys now opine you're playing off to please the cap'n."

"Pack of —— lies!" This very fiercely. "Why, Ike, what sense would there be in that sort of play? The boys are dawg-gone fools to git such idees. What good would it do me? We all share alike below the cap'n."

"We do, except when we catch women. But it ain't women that's gnawing the boys. Do you know, Bill, they got the idee this fuss is 'bout over. Redcoats will be licked to —— and back. But say the reds win. That raid on our camp showed how much they like us. One side's got to win. What happens to us after it's over? Every man for himself. Cap'n going to look out for us? Bah! He'll hog the stuff and make for New 'Leans or Florida. Mebbe he'll need a hand to help get away with the stuff. And you're shining up to him, Bill. Be you planning to make a journey with him at the wind-up?"

They were now fairly abreast of us and only my hand on the captain's shoulder restrained him from attacking them. There was tragedy in the crisp evening air. Even the captain sensed some gruesome climax shaping. The man Ike's thinly veiled accusation that his companion was planning to abandon the gang and flee with Ganner would not be glossed over or ignored.

Both knew this and both maneuvered their horses until they faced each other. Each was leaning forward to watch the other's eyes. Ike must have realized he had gone too far unless he went the full distance; for he lost his head a bit and spoke rapidly, saying:

"Bill, the boys don't trust you. They opine you told the cap'n things that made him shoot Slim Ellery. The reason he give was plumb foolishness. The boys opine the true reason as things Slim said when the cap'n wasn't round and which you blabbed."

We could hear the deep intake of breath as Bill filled his lungs. Extending his empty right hand, he dramatically cried—

"Ike, I swear I hope that hand'll wither if ever I said a dawg-gone word to the hurt of any man in our band."

And he lifted the hand solemnly, thus diverting his companion's attention for a second, while he whipped up a pistol with his left hand. The weapon was discharged close to Ike's head, and without even a groan he slumped forward in the saddle and toppled over into the road.

"Never watch a man's empty hand, Ike,

—— you," panted the murderer. "Hi! Whoa!" This as Ike's horse shied close to our hiding-place and turned to bolt back to the camp. Bill's mount was sent across the road and the rider was reaching out to grasp the bridle when the captain leaped from cover and dragged him from the saddle.

I followed to lend a hand. Posby grunted for me to keep off. I persisted in my good intentions for the situation was too critical to be nice in deportment. They whirled about so rapidly, however, and the gathering dusk was so confusing that the captain's love for "fair play" in a scrimmage was satisfied. As I danced from side to side in my helplessness they fell with a crash. Only one regained his feet. It was Posby.

"Is he dead?" I whispered.

"Got him with his own knife," puffed the captain. "Strong devil, but a trifle weak on wrestling as we do it in old England. What now?"

◆

POSBY had killed him without gaining possession of the knife for the handle was still clutched in the dead man's hand.

"Leave him here. Take the knife and throw it into the brush. Let his horse go free. Catch the other horse and take him into the woods. Then help me lug Ike's body into the woods——"

"Let the blasted beggars stay here," growled the captain.

"They'll ride down here to investigate that shot. Bill was Ganner's tool. He must be found dead. Ike is missing. The gang will think Ike did for him. That is why we must keep Ike's horse from bolting. If Bill killed Ike he would hide the body and make back to camp and tell Ganner about the gang's suspicions. So Bill must be found dead and Ike gone with his own horse."

"You got a head on you, young fellow," admired the captain as he led Ike's horse into the brush and secured him. Then the two of us picked up the dead man and carried him a few rods into the woods and piled brush over the body. The captain recovered the horse and, securing our own animals, we pushed ahead. The third horse would do for the girl if we could rescue her.

In advancing we drew closer to the road as it was rapidly growing dark in the growth. As we expected a squad of men galloped by us to learn the reason for the single pistol-shot. The promptness with which they showed up proved the camp was even nearer than I had imagined. Eight of the bandits had died the death since the raid on the Macson cabin.

There were at least ten in the squad now tearing down the road to investigate the shooting. If poor Dick Macson had correctly counted the bandits there would be scarcely a score at the camp. I mentioned this result of my figuring to Posby, who enthusiastically vowed:

"Cursedly good sportsmanship on your part, Jim! Ten to one. Gad! We'll take the trick or I'll eat my legs."

It was quite useless to attempt explaining I had no thought of offering open battle to the bandits in camp. Time enough to disappoint him when we found them. Our desire to reach the camp before the squad returned made us quite reckless and we only hoped that if our progress through the darkening woods attracted attention it would be attributed to some of the scouts.

Now that the sun had gone we had no way of knowing when we were near the end of the woods, and I, at least, was disagreeably startled to burst from cover and find ourselves in a small clearing and within two hundred feet of a log cabin. To add to my alarm a dark object moved from the shadows at one end of the low structure and advanced a few steps toward us and called out—

"Some of the boys?"

"It's Ike," I growled. "Keep my horse here till I come for him." And with that I slapped the dead man's animal and sent him trotting toward the figure. The captain had taken his cue instantly and held our horses in the edge of the cover. The man caught the nag by the bridle and as I was retreating squealed after me:

"What's this on the saddle? It's wet and sticky! It's blood, Ike!"

"Well, it ain't mine," I gruffly assured him. "Keep the nag close and keep your mouth shut or you'll be paying a visit to Cap'n Ganner."

"Gawd save me that!" he exclaimed in a half-whisper. "I'd ruther have a knife at my throat then to hear him laff like he does tonight. Wish I didn't have to stand guard here. I'll take good care of the hoss. I'm a friend to all you boys. Friend to the cap'n, too. Allers remember that, Ike."

I grunted unintelligibly and joined Posby. He softly protested:

"Rather a devilish poor play that. Now we're lacking a horse for the young woman."

"We may be wanting four stout walls to hide behind until help can come," I answered him. "When we find my cousin we'll fall back this way. If the road's clear we'll pick up that horse. If we're hard pressed we'll take over the cabin."

"Evict the scoundrel? Entirely right. Now to find their beastly camp."

We swung around the cabin, still keeping in the woods, until we came to where the ground sloped down into a hollow. The laurel and cypress grew thickly to the edge of the slope, then ceased, leaving the ground bare of any covering. Several camp-fires burning below informed us we had reached the end of our search.

"Good ground for maneuvering his troops, with cover on three sides, " mused Posby. "He has the military sense. If the girl's among those fires it'll be Lord Harry's job to get her out."

I realized this, and my spirits began to sink. On the north the woods encroached nearer to the fires than at any other point. To take the horses down the slope and through the woods would require too much time and caution and would more than double our chances of being discovered. So I told the captain we must leave our mounts there in the laurel and make the rest of the distance without them.

He cheerfully agreed to the wisdom of this, and added:

"If we don't find the young woman we won't need any horses. We'll be like those old chaps who held the mountain-pass till all were —— well done in."

This sentiment fell in with my notions. If we didn't get the girl out of Ganner's clutches I for one did not care to ride back to Lynch's Creek, but it was most generous on the captain's part to feel that way. We hitched the animals with a long halter, so they might nose about and play at grazing and then began our forward movement in a half-circle.

I do not think Ganner had any sentries out toward the north. So far as that goes the only sentry we were to see that night was the fellow at the cabin in the clearing. If there were any outposts we were very fortunate, or else they were very deaf; for we received no challenges; and at his best the captain was noisy at times and had a most reprehensible habit of profanely complaining when he slipped on a wet root and fell.

Without any alarms we made the wooded point nearest the fires and began estimating the number of the bandits. I counted twenty-seven and Posby counted thirty. Ganner was reclining near the central fire and I should not have picked him out very readily if not guided by a strange, whining laugh, the like of which I had never heard before. But there was no sign of the girl. Surely I would have surrendered all hope had I not recalled the talk between Ike and Bill down the road. Both had spoken as if the girl were alive. But if not here in camp, where was she?

"What was that thing on your left?" whispered Posby. "Looks like a small house."

It was near our position and sharing our concealment of the night. Had it been between us and the fires we would have sighted it at once, but being at one side it would not have been surprizing if we had not discovered it at all.

"It's a cabin!" I told him, my heart filling with hope. "The girl's there!"

"Then we're wasting time among these bushes," he replied, preparing to advance and investigate the cabin.

I restrained him and studied the cabin with a new fear. While it was the only place in the hollow where Elsie could be concealed from our view, I could discover no guards about the structure. A stout cabin, securely fastened, might need no guard, but Ganner was not the kind to take any chances, especially when the prize was Elsie Macson.

I led the way until directly behind the squat shape and was disappointed to find it was even smaller than I had supposed. Posby was much ruffled when I insisted he remain behind and allow me to scout alone. Quitting the growth, I crawled toward the fires, practising some of the woodcraft I had learned in my boyhood among the friendly Cherokees, who were ever visiting my uncle's plantation. I needed but little cunning, however, to crawl two hundred feet.

There was none of the band near the structure and I made the distance rapidly. Even before I gained one end of it I knew it had been used as horse-hovel. Risking vagrant rays of light from the fires I rounded the corner and found the front open to the weather. Thus were my hopes dashed. My heart had been so high on discovering the shack that the reaction left me sick at heart. Ganner was in camp but the girl had vanished.

Her resolute spirit would gladly prefer death to the fate Ganner had planned for her; and if not for the words between the two villains in the road I would have assumed her to be dead. I rose to my feet and stared at the central fire. Posby softly whistled for me to drop on fours again. Ganner jumped to his feet and I took it for granted he had seen me. But he was erect from an entirely different reason.

The squad we had seen galloping down the road was now streaming back into the hollow and the leader was impatient to receive its report. They rode in a bunch to the fire and one of them began talking. I saw Ganner strike his hands together and I surmised he was being told how one of his tools was dead and that Ike was missing. I could not know if the scouts had found the man Posby had killed.

THE sound of a violent struggle in the growth where I had left Posby aroused me from my despair; and bowing low, I ran to aid him. I believed he was getting the worst of it, for his assailant, although able to fight fiercely, gave no call for assistance; and it is most difficult to throttle a man in the dark without his having at least one chance to cry out.

As I glided among the trees the struggling ceased. The sound of labored breathing guided me and as I noiselessly approached I was rejoiced to hear Posby panting:

"—— your cursed impudence! You would fight a king's officer, would you?"

"Posby!" I whispered. "Less noise, man. What is it?"

"I've got him tight, Jim, but blast my blood if I dare let go. Find his weazen with your knife."

A cold-blooded business, if not for thoughts of poor Elsie burning out my brain. I drew my knife and cautiously ran my hand over the tangled forms of the two men until it rested on a neck:

"Good ——, Jim! Not mine!"

I investigated farther and found a more scrawny throat, and in locating it, my fingers trailed over a long bony face and a tuft of chin-whiskers. There was something strongly reminiscent in that countenance and whisker; nor did it connect up with any recollection of Ganner's men.

Posby had his fingers buried in the fellow's throat and I whispered:

"Loosen your grip a trifle."

"He'll let out a cursed yell!"

"But he didn't when you were fighting with him."

"Eh? Bleed me if he did! But be ready with your snickerses. I'll loosen, but the devil snatch us if you haven't room enough to do for him."

I bowed my head, and as the pressure was slightly relaxed the one word "Shonts" came in a gasping whisper. Then I identified the long, bony face and pendulous whisker. Shonts, the scout, was the fellow I had been trying to associate with the picture my groping fingers had translated to my brain.

"This is Lance. Nod your head if you understand," I murmured.

"What the—" began Posby, perhaps thinking I was addressing him.

But I felt the head wriggle, and I told the captain:

"Hands off. He's one of Marion's scouts. He's the fellow who made you a prisoner."

"The devilish arm-twister!" growled Posby, reluctantly removing his hand and drawing back. "And to think that when I got my turn at him I had to have help!"

Shonts panted for breath, then huskily whispered:

"Didn't gin me a show. Throw him in a jiffy if I have a square shape. I was follerin' you two an' felt really friendly when I bumped into this cuss. Some whangdoodle at that!"

"Following us? How did you know we were here?"

"Met young Macson streakin' for the island. Where's the gal?"

"God help her! I don't know. She isn't in camp, but Ganner's there."

"Then she's near. Passed a likely lookin' cabin near the edge of the holler. Just back of where I found your hosses hitched in the laurel. Man out front with a gun. No lights showin'. Mebbe she's held fast there."

I could have hugged him for joy. Posby was roundly cursing himself for his stupidity. We had passed within fifty feet of her prison. Ganner had not dared to take her into camp.

"A feller don't guard a dark cabin for fun," Shonts hoarsely continued. "If he's 'fraid for hisself he stays inside or runs away."

"Back to the cabin!" I urged, now feverish to exhaust this last possibility.

"You two wildcats prowl ahead. I'll soon jine you," said Shonts.

Posby and I lost no time in retracing our steps and had covered half the distance and were swinging in at the foot of the slope when Shonts came tearing after us. He must have possessed the eyes of a cat to thread his way through the timber at double our gait.

"Pick up your heels!" he snapped. "Ganner's breakin' camp. Scouts brought news that's upset him. He's makin' a night-ride of it. Something queer has been killin' off his men."

We no longer attempted to practise stealth. If Shonts' information was correct it would be a race between us afoot and the gang mounted, the cabin being the goal. Ganner had a straight line to the cabin; we still had some distance to go before ending our half-circle. I no longer dared to follow the edge of the growth to the open lane leading to the top of the slope, for this would be Ganner's road, and already the bustling and confusion of his men breaking camp was audible in the quiet night. Instead I plunged deeper into the timber and took a diagonal course up the grade.

"We can't make it!" I cried, as we heard the pounding of many hoofs.

"Our chances are about as good as a counterfeit Spanish half-joe!" panted Posby.

"Keep pluggin' along. I'll cut straight across an' hold 'em back a trifle. Stand by to let me into the cabin on the jump; for when I come I'll be traveling light an' fast," ordered Shonts. Without waiting to learn our ideas on his proposal he left us, moving along the brow of the slope at right angles to Ganner's line of approach. His plan was simple; he purposed reaching the narrow lane through which the horsemen must pass and halting the bandits long enough for us to make the cabin.

We summoned new energy and soon heard the scout's rifle disputing the right of way. There came a roar of rage quickly followed by a rattling volley. Next we heard the brave fellow yelling:

"Come on, boys! Here the varmints be!"

An ancient ruse, yet often successful; for one can never know for a surety whether the "boys" are actually present or a deception. It served to halt the bandits for a full minute, allowing Posby and me to clear the top of the slope. Then Ganner's passionate voice rang out:

"Up and get him, you fools! He's all alone!"

The thumping of the horses taking the slope on the gallop was punctuated by another shot from the scout's long rifle; and the immediate explosion of rage evidenced further loss to the enemy. But the absence of additional rifle-fire told the Regulators that Ganner had spoken the truth, that only one man was opposing them; and there was no further let-up in the advance.

We made our way through the last fringe of growth with more than one tumble. There was much pistol-firing as we ran across the clearing, and I feared they were hunting my brave friend close.

"Who is it? What is it?" called a frightened voice from the end of the cabin.

"It's Ike! Skin out for your life! Marion's men are coming!" I cried.

With a howl of fear the creature crashed into the brush and we staggered on to the door.

"Elsie! Elsie! Elsie!" I cried as we fumbled to find the fastening.

"Cousin Jim?" answered her dear voice.

"Jim and a friend!" I panted, tearing at the captain's hands in my madness to have the door open.

"Here's the da-dandy contrivance!" choked the captain, yanking something loose and throwing back the door.

We leaped in as the mob of horsemen broke into the clearing. Ganner's voice was raised in the scream of a madman, a malignant falsetto of rage and withal so feral as to chill my blood. Posby was shouting for me to find something to prop against the door, when something fell against it and a faint voice was demanding, "Let me in—Shonts."

The enemy were coming pell-mell for the cabin as I opened the door and caught Shonts' sagging form and dragged him in. As I released him he went down on the beaten earth floor like a bag of meal. The door was closed again and Posby located a cypress beam and found the depression in the hard floor where the butt rested when it was used as a prop.

"Fell back in good order—fetched off all my arms," Shonts exulted in a faint voice.

Something stirred at the end of the cabin and light steps glided toward the prostrate man.

"Elsie!" I softly called as I made for the hole which served as a window.

"Jim!" she sighed, and that ended our greetings.

For now a mass of men was at the door. I discharged both pistols from the window and stepped aside to allow Posby to take my place. He fired with more deliberation, emptying his four weapons. Screams of pain followed our six shots and with the men jammed together it was impossible to miss. They ran back in disorder to where they had left their horses.

"The place is full of 'em!" howled one of the bandits.

"Then —— will be full of them!" screamed Ganner, his voice taking on a whine that reminded me of a singing rifle-bullet.

"Reload, Jim!" snapped Posby, now as cool and collected as if on parade. "It's going to be —— sportsman-like for us."

ALREADY I had reloaded one pistol in the darkness and soon had its mate ready. But I think he had his four done almost as soon.

"Get the old man's rifle," he sharply ordered. "His pistol, if he has any. Left my rifle in the woods; curse it! See if there's any other window in this coop."

"There's only the one window," spoke up Elsie. "Here is the rifle, loaded. I'll have the two pistols ready in a half a minute."

"My friend is Captain Posby, of his Majesty's forces," I told her through the opaque blackness. "Elsie Macson, my cousin, Captain Posby."

I knew he was bowing low and sweeping the dirt floor with his hat.

"I make you my compliments, Mistress Elsie Macson. No wonder you Americans can fight when you have such women!" he said. Then to me, "What are they at now, Jim?"

"That whining voice is Ganner's. He's insane, I take it. Now he's telling——"

"He's telling them what? I didn't catch it," Posby innocently prompted as I caught my tongue.

"He's telling them to set the cabin on fire," quietly supplied the girl. "Jim, don't be afraid for me. I've seen my father killed by our own burning cabin. Fire is clean. Death is clean. I shall never be afraid again. I think poor Shonts is done for."

"Gawdfry! It was a whang-doodle worth dyin' for," gasped Shonts from the floor. "An' mebbe the old man's got one more fight left in him yet—once he gits his wind back."

"Help me get him out of range of the window, Jim," she ordered. I felt my way to the two of them and for a second my hands touched hers and grasped them tightly. As gently as possible we moved the wounded man into a corner. Elsie asked me to make a light so she could see to dress his wounds, but Shonts vehemently protested:

"If you make a light they'll bag you like coons in a holler log. No hurry 'bout me. One of you keep close to the winder an' well to one side. 'Tother stand by the door. Oughter be a hole in the door somewheres."

"Here they come," warned the captain from the window.

"Here are the pistols," whispered the girl, finding my hands and placing the weapons in them. I sprang to the door and made sure the prop was secure and then took my place beside the captain.

The unison of their tramping feet told us they were keeping step, but it was not until they were within a few yards of the door that we learned the reason for their precise advance. Two files of men were carrying a long log. Posby fired a pistol into the middle of the mass and I let go with the rifle at the leading couple. Down went two men for the others to stumble over and down went the log.

The two lines began to disintegrate and fade out in the darkness, leaving a trail of groans and curses as we scored with further shots. From somewhere in the background came the whining voice of Ganner. He had been in a terrible rage the night I escaped his clutches, but this peculiar quality of voice was new to me. I heard him cursing the men for cowards and one of his followers, anonymous because of the darkness, advised him to prove his own mettle.

With a thin snarl he ran for the cabin. We could glimpse him indistinctly as he bounded along and the captain fired and missed. Before either of us could try another shot Ganner was at the window and had burned my cheek with the discharge of a pistol, and had clawed the hat from Posby's head and was racing back to his men, taunting them with horrible oaths and silencing them by displaying his trophy.

"Open the door, Jim. I'm going after that hat," Posby hoarsely said.

"You're as crazy as Ganner," I answered.

"It makes bad friends to link my name with his," Posby grimly replied. "I'm going to get that hat. Stand clear, Jim."

"Then your hat is of more account than I am, Captain Posby?" Elsie softly asked. She was close beside us and I knew her hand was resting on his arm.

"God forgive me!" he choked. "The hat shall wait. I—I need to be quite alone to express myself becomingly—yes, becomingly. He—he was so cursedly insistent on having the hat, Mistress Elsie."

"You are a brave man," she cooed. "Jim had to come here because he's my kinsman. You came although it wasn't your fight and I belong to the enemy——"

"Old Jim's fight is my fight, young lady, when it isn't reb—patriot against the king—And they're up to something. I hope they'll charge again. I hope their head devil will come after my head to put in the hat!"

Ganner's reckless act had inspired his men with fresh ferocity. A rush was made for the log and Posby warned me to wait until they had picked it up before firing. The attacking party was covered this time by a volley of lead that plunked into the logs or hurtled through the window. Under protection of this heavy fire the others swarmed down on the log.

Against the background of the night we could make them out as a mass, not as units. They rushed forward, and by the undulations of the mass we knew they were swinging the log back and forth to give it a battering-ram's momentum.

We fired despite the efforts of the covering-party to keep us from the window. Again men groaned and fell. The captain swore viciously between his clinched teeth, and I knew he had been hit. The bandits were streaming back to safety. But our second victory lost its savor when we heard Ganner's whining laugh back of the cabin.

While his men charged he had passed behind the cabin and was up to new deviltry. We reloaded, aided by Elsie, and I searched for a loophole through which to pot Ganner. The cabin had been constructed without any provision for this means of defense and although only the thickness of the log wall was between us I could not get at the devil.

As I examined the wall, leaving the captain to guard the window, some one bumped into me and I was startled, for it was not the slim form of the girl.

"Time I got up," said Shonts' voice. "Hear that critter yowl! Like a painter that's lost a cub."

"Go back! Lie down!" I commanded, pursuing my quest from a crevice through which I could shoot.

"La, for me! I've got another fight left in my old carcass," said Shonts, yet leaving me, and, as I supposed, obeying me.

"All clear on your side, captain?" I whispered.

"Tediously so. That's a funny noise—On the roof."

I heard it, a faint scraping sound. The roof would be formed of poles, snugly thatched with bark.

"He's up there!" gasped the girl. "He's trying to get through."

I danced about with pistols raised, trying to locate the exact spot where the intruder was working.

"What the —— you doing with that door?" roared the captain.

I was not near the door and yet as I wheeled about I could glimpse the faint stars where there should have been stout timbers. It lasted for a second or two, then the stars were shut out. I threw myself forward and found the door closed, but the prop was on the floor. I replaced it and felt my skin prickle as the girl exclaimed:

"It was open! Who came in?"

I made toward her, commanding:

"Back in the corner! Look out, captain! That devil's in here!"

"You're crazy!" growled Posby, yet with much uneasiness in his voice. "There! That proves it!"

The last in great relief as the scratching sound was renewed overhead.

"He's still on the roof."

"Shonts!" I called. "Shonts! Where are you?" But I knew he was gone, that it was his stealthy departure that had left the door unpropped. I knew it before putting the question. And before the girl or Posby could speak I heard something dragging over the edge of the roof, and it was not Ganner, for now he raised a loud shout and yelled for his men to attack, proclaiming he was about to tear off a part of the roof and take the fighting to us on the inside.

His men howled back, sounding like so many wild beasts, and began to advance. The increased volume of their cursing marked their progress. As they began to be vaguely discernible there came a loud ripping noise and several of the roof-poles were torn loose and thrown with their bark covering to the ground outside the window.

"We've got them!" exulted Ganner, his words coming with a scream.

I FIRED toward the opening and Posby fired at the gang, leaving it to me to meet Ganner. I heard a mocking laugh and knew my shot had missed; and there grew up within me a peculiar horror of the man. One star glimmered through the roof and as it vanished I knew he was descending. I groped with one hand to seize him by the leg, holding my pistol ready to settle the business. I touched one kicking heel and heard him give a muffled cry. The next moment I was on my back with the wind knocked out of me.

"——, Jim! Can't you manage him?" snarled Posby from the window.

Pumping for breath, I rolled one side and discovered Ganner must have met with a mishap, else why did he kick about so convulsively? Then came the blessed relief of hearing the scout's voice crying:

"—— your liver! How does that taste in your gizzard?"

"Shonts!" I choked, creeping toward him.

"Don't mind me," he whispered. "Help t'other cuss. Knowed I had one more fight in me."

It was high time to help Posby, for his weapons were empty and he was dashing the butt of the rifle through the opening. Now and then a streak of fire and the acrid smell of gunpowder told of some daring bandit's success in shooting through the window. The door groaned and buckled but still held.

"Hit again, Jim!" growled Posby. "Eh? Gad, but that spoiled a face!"

And even in the tumult I heard the sickening crunch of the heavy butt smashing into flesh and bone. Then my friend cried out—

"Help me if you can, Jim!"

I dragged him to one side and grabbed the rifle. A gun-barrel slid through the opening and I yanked it inside and reversed it and shot the brute. An arm thrust in a pistol and was cracked by the rifle-barrel. The weapon fell undischarged and I recovered it. Some one crowded close behind me, some one too slender for Posby's stocky figure.

"Use this," she whispered and she thrust into my hands a pole, to the end of which was lashed a long hunting-knife.

I seized it eagerly and with my first essay pinked a devil ten feet from the window.

"——! They're shooting with bows an' arrers!" I heard him cry.

"Where's the cap'n?" demanded another.

"He's dead! We'll toss his head out to you when we get time," I shouted.

"The door, Jim! Take the door!" snapped the captain, dragging himself along the wall to my side. He had found a three-legged stool, home-made and very cumbersome, but very solid. He shoved the seat a few inches through the opening and the spreading legs caused it to stick fast. It effectually blocked the window except the small holes at the corners.

I took my position at the door. The prop still held, but one of the timbers had been hacked in two. With every drive of the ax the splinters flew and the bandits howled and worked with the energy of hell's finest. A pistol flashing almost in my face revealed a hole big enough to admit an arm. As the weapon was withdrawn I inserted the spear and thrust mightily and felt it meet resistance.

"Help him! Here are three loaded pistols," I heard Elsie say. "I'll watch the window."

The captain staggered against me as I yanked in my spear. "Beats all the fighting in the colonies, Jim," he cried. "——! But that cousin of yours is a wonderful woman. God save the king! But he'll never win over here. We can lick your men, but not the women——"

A whole section of timber crashed in and the prop began to give. Dropping on one knee, I drove the spear through the opening. The captain reached out an arm and discharged a pistol, following up with the other two. I prodded and thrust and was conscious of blood running down my head and neck. The cheering seemed to swell in volume until it filled the world. How could there be so many of them to cheer when we had killed so many? The door crashed in on us, and the last thing my senses registered was a crashing volley of rifle-fire.

I opened my eyes and found I was shivering from the chill of the night and the water that had been spilled over me in an effort to restore my senses. Only my head felt comfortable and this because it rested on a pillow. I had been placed near a camp-fire and across from me was Captain Posby, half-reclining, his head grotesquely bandaged and one arm in a sling. Beyond him were two figures stretched out very straight. I identified Shonts by his whiskers. Then some one approached and placed a hand on my head and for the first time I realized I, also, was bandaged. And a voice gently asked—

"How is he doing?"

"I think he is coming to," Elsie's voice replied; and my pillow moved a bit and I knew my head was resting in her lap.

"Good! We can't afford to lose him."

It was Marion, for now I saw him pass around the fire and pause to talk with Posby.

I heard the dear fellow faintly boasting: "General, it was the ——est fighting any one ever saw. And old Jim! I'll eat my ears if he didn't do more real work than your brigade's done in six months— No offense. He and that exceedingly sportsman-like old chap who rallied on the roof did more fighting than Tarleton's whole legion has done during the war."

"You also were there and had a hand," said Marion.

"Most devilishly obliged, but I was at the window, looking on. It was fearfully convenient to have your men come. They saved old Jim and his lady."

My pillow shifted more pronouncedly.

With a few more words to the captain the general walked to the side of Shonts and stood with head uncovered in homage to a very brave man; a man uncultured and entirely ignorant of the polished niceties of deportment, but whose brave heart must find much grace with God. Turning to the second silent figure, the general clapped his hat on his head and sternly commanded: "Take *that* away and bury it. It has no right to rest so near my best scout."

The fire leaped higher as fresh fuel was added. From between half-closed lids I watched Posby's admiring gaze fixed on the girl. I could not see her face without betraying the fact that I had regained my senses. Her hand fluttered over my forehead to brush back a long lock of my lank hair, a thoroughly motherly gesture. Posby involuntarily exclaimed—

"Lucky dog!"

I must have betrayed myself, for she was bending forward, her brown eyes staring into mine, and she was saying—

"I think, Mr. Lance, you've recovered enough to sit up a bit."

I struggled to a sitting-posture and my head ached villainously. At first the concern in her face encouraged me to believe she was to take pity on me and restore the gracious privilege to my poor head. Then there rose a clamor on the outskirts of the clearing and she was standing up to discover the cause. Shouts of rage, oaths and threats filled the air and men were struggling to get at something held in the center of another group of men.

"Hang him! Tuck him up! The dirty spy!" These were some of the exclamations which helped to explain the little tragedy.

The girl was running toward the confusion and before the excited mob realized her purpose she had fought her way like a wildcat to the center of the throng, and as the men fell back under her fierce onslaught I glimpsed the white hair and beard of Ambros, the Old Fox. And there was a rope around his yellow neck and one patriot was throwing the loose end over a branch.

"You shall not!" the girl loudly defied, trying to remove the noose.

"He's a spy, Elsie Macson! Out of the way!" roared an infuriated patriot.

I staggered to my feet and Posby followed my example.

"The little lady must have her way," Posby declared, walking unsteadily beside me.

But our interference was unnecessary, for Marion now arrived and took control of the prisoner.

"But he's a most notorious spy, general," protested one of his officers.

"Eh! Gad! One of Cornwallis' finest," Posby muttered.

Marion frowned and held up his hand for silence. Then to Ambros:

"This ends your usefulness. Why did you come here?"

His men were staring at him in great bewilderment because of his speech. Old Ambros tossed off the noose and replied:

"It was the girl. I didn't know you had saved her. When I heard I had to follow. Your men picked me up. That's all. But I can still work."

"No," regretted General Marion. Then to his gaping audience he said, "Change every thought you've had concerning Ellis Ambros. He has been my most successful spy. The news I've received so promptly was furnished by him and sent to Elsie Macson, who relayed it to my camp. This misadventure spoils his usefulness. But let it be remembered that no stancher patriot lives in South Carolina, or in any of these United States."

CHAPTER XIII

PICTURES

WE WERE at Snow's Island—Elsie, her two brothers and myself, and Captain Posby had formally settled the matter of his parole and was about to leave us. We were indulging in light talk to hide our true feelings and I said—

"Captain, you will remember your promise to tweak a certain individual's nose?"

"Gad! I do. And I'll keep my word."

"I told you I would give you the opportunity."

"Let it pass, old Jim. I've lost heart a bit for everything. It must be the cursed water we drink or the general's vinegar he asked me to try. It was no promise you made," he morosely answered.

"I consider it a promise. Behold my wife to be, Elsie Macson."

"Haven't you driven me crazy with envy already?" he complained as he bowed deeply to the blushing Elsie.

"In looking at her you also behold the first Lieutenant Drance to enter Charleston."

"Eh? Ha, ha! One of your beastly clever jokes, I take it. Mistress Elsie the bogus Drance! Clever, I'll swear! And yet, what's so infernally funny about such a grotesque conceit? No, Jim! The more I think of it the less I care for the association."

"I was the make-believe Lieutenant Drance, Captain Posby," she gravely assured him. And her countenance was so sober of expression I wondered if she was again seeing the city-gate in the torchlight or hearing the tramp of Wemyss' horsemen.

Posby was much upset by this revelation and for some time could say nothing. Then he began muttering:

"Lieutenant Drance, ruffler and gay blade, and Mistress Elsie Macson, thoroughly womanly, exquisitely charming—one and the same! God bless us, Jim! My reason's going."

Then his dignity came back to him and bending low over her small brown hand he kissed it and straightening, solemnly declared:

"One of his Majesty's officers must break his word. It's time I was going home."

That little picture remains more clear to me than many of the stirring events which followed. There were the local yet pivotal affairs of the Cowpens, Guilford Court House, Hobkirk's Hill, and Eutaw Springs, through which I passed with excellent fortune, and of which I recall but few details, for my heart was back with my girl wife. There was Cornwallis' withdrawal into the Virginia trap, driven there by the brilliant Greene, whose maneuvering of a small army places his technique at the head of all similar military achievements. And so on through the rest of the war.

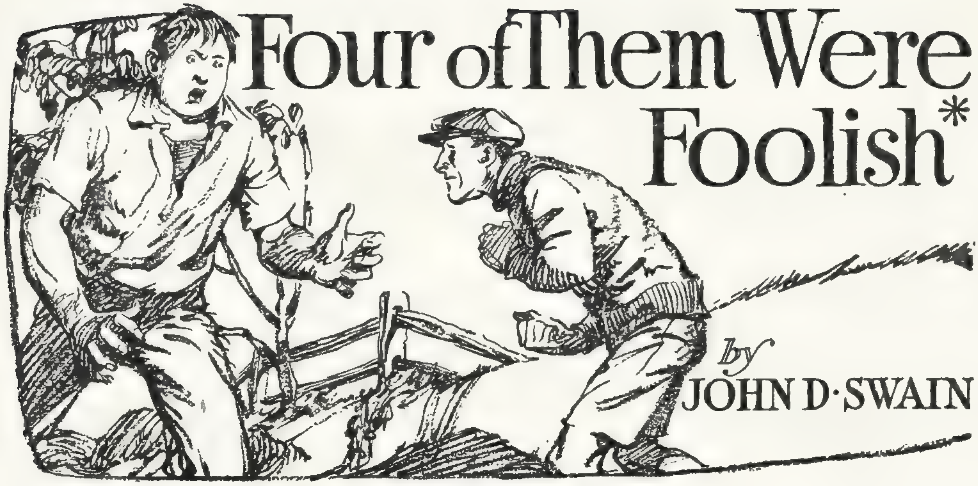
There was that proud day in December when we marched into Charleston and were tearfully greeted from windows and doors, from balconies and roofs, with the heartfelt, "God bless you, gentlemen!" and "You are welcome, gentlemen!" There was Uncle David, sturdiest of patriots now, making much ado about our entry.

How delighted the old gentleman was to see me! How pleased and proud he was to have had Elsie with him while waiting for our coming! What toasts we drank to these United States, and how gleefully my uncle insisted that he knew all along how it would all end, and that his Toryism was simply a subterfuge to confound the enemy! And how oblivious I was to all those details because of my great joy in beholding her again!

But if war memories are blurred and I find myself failing to recall much that was in each picture, there is one golden thread I can trace throughout all the years, the memory of that gallant soldier and good friend, Beau Posby, Captain Posby, an ornament and pillar of his Majesty's army until the fate of his calling overtook him. God rest his generous soul and the soul of all others like him.

THE END

Four of Them Were Foolish*



by

JOHN D. SWAIN

Author of "The House Opposite."

THE pool in the woods was so black under the shadow of the rock pines which grew to its very rim that its unruffled surface looked as solid as polished basalt. Where the sun's rays struck through the topmost branches they pierced the clear depths like golden spears, revealing great trout on the sandy bottom, their fins lazily stirring to overcome the specific gravity that gently urged them surfaceward.

The four figures which loomed on that side of the pool whose waters were deepest struck an incongruous note in the idyl. Reading from left to right, as the group pictures in the Sunday magazine sections do, they were: Sergius Stepoff, a Russian wrestler; Ichyaga, a lithe Japanese ju-jutsu expert; a young American light-heavyweight boxer named K. O. Mooney; and a cockney welter who called himself 'Arry, and was so hailed by his fellows of "Spike" Halloran's stable of near-champions.

It was mid-August, real dog-day weather, and the canny Spike had sent them out of the city where men burrow underground into dark cellars and imbibe vast beakers of such cold and unwholesome fluids as may be obtained for a price.

"Don't let 'em do nothing but roadwork," he told faithful Andy, the negro cook and handy man who had charge of the camp. "I ain't gonna let 'em have no mitts nor nothing. I want 'em to eat and sleep and go in swimming and just loaf where there's no skirts nor roof gardens nor cellar dives. Time enough to groom 'em for the Winter when they come home in October. Putting on weight won't do no harm so long's it's good meat and not hot dogs and cold suds."

"Yassir, boss, I got ya," said Andy.

There were five small tents pitched in a huckleberry pasture a quarter of a mile from the swimming-hole, each with its mosquito-bar and bed of pine boughs and army blankets. In Andy's cook tent was a good oil-stove and kitchen equipment. The table was an affair of rough planks with a canvas awning for rainy days.

The location was on the land of a farmer who lived four miles out from a small village which lacked even a picture palace, and whose prosperity was derived from the products of the soil. Hulbert, the taciturn man who gave Spike Halloran's athletes the run of his pasture and the privilege of the pool and a spring of ice-cold water, also furnished them with milk, bread, butter, vegetables and eggs. Other supplies were fetched to them from the general store at the village.

If the four strong men have been left poised for a little time on the rim of their natural swimming-tank, it is for a purpose. They were in no hurry to immerse themselves in the cool depths. Each in his own way posed, clad only in bathing-trunks, the surprizing thews and muscles of his disciplined body startlingly outlined against the dark-green curtain of the pines.

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* *This is an Off-the-Trail Story. See first contents page.*

The big Russian, hands clasped behind his square, close-cropped head, flexed his biceps, which rose and fell in smooth billows. Then he slowly filled his lungs, until his great chest swelled out like a barrel. The little Jap, having no great muscles to display, held an old rusty horseshoe in his hands. His art demanded extraordinary power of grip; and the veins in his thick wrists stood out as he slowly straightened the iron. K. O. Mooney did a bit of shadow-boxing on his tuft of grass, his swift, feline motions as beautiful in their way as a ballet dancer's. The cockney—as hairy as an ape—stood on his head, walked about on his hands, and finally led the way by turning a neat back-somersault and landing in the water with a tremendous splash.

Squatting in ecstasy on the far shore was the inspiration of this extempore performance. A thin line of little naked boys, their eyes popping, fingers opening and closing, formed an audience that was better than none. The professional strong man is the most self-conscious creature alive. Compared to him the long-haired pianist, the tragedian, the soap-box orator and the movie star are shy and shrinking blossoms. Spike Halloran's quartet studiously ignored the little boys, but every attitude was struck for their benefit.

"Gee! Lookit! Betcha his muscle's more'n a foot round! Golly—look how long he's holdin' his breath! He could lick Dempsey, easy. Wait till the other fellers hear 'bout it!"

Their treble piping was sweet music in the athletes' cauliflowered ears. After they had floundered about for a while and gone back to their camp, the little boys had their swim; and all of them performed much more creditably than their elders had. Then they dressed and slipped away. Their folks would have been very angry to find them here, for they regarded the campers with the utmost disfavor, as a little higher than burglars, but much below hoboes. The latter would occasionally split a half-cord of wood, or even help get in a few loads of hay.

The farmers were at their wits' end for help. That their sons and hired men were all leaving the austere farms for the exorbitant wages of factory and store was bad enough but comprehensible. That able-bodied men should jog along the dusty highway for exercise, while wood—worth eighteen dollars the cord—awaited the ax, and apples—worth a nickel apiece—rotted under the trees, and fallow soil was being turned back to pasture for lack of hands to guide the plow and scatter seed, was an abomination in the sweat-blinded eyes of the thinning ranks of men who were trying to feed a hundred million avid mouths by rising before the sun, working steadily for sixteen hours and crawling stiff-legged to bed about the time their chickens went to roost.

They raised bent shoulders from cornfield and garden patch to see the great Russian, the little Jap, the American and the hairy cockney, muffled in sweaters, trot past to keep down the flesh made by rivers of unskimmed milk, batches of wheaten bread thick spread with fresh-churned butter and honey, whole nestfuls of eggs, fried chicken and steaks, roasting ears and potatoes, and home-cured hams, prepared by the tireless Andy.

The things they said under their breaths as they gripped hoe and spade again, if overheard by the proud-stepping athletes, would have led to mutilation and death. As it was, they merely stepped a little higher, threw out their great chests a little farther, when they had—as they thought—appreciative spectators.

They ate and slept prodigiously and fully justified Spike Halloran's idea of the boon of getting back to nature before Fall training began. They were a little bored, because they were all city bred; they missed the smells of gasoline, hot asphalt and cheap perfumery, the roar of traffic, cries of newsboys and street vendors, jazz bands and inane feminine giggles. They were easily scared by the little garter snakes, the big gray spiders, the mysterious cries of nocturnal birds, the sound of a fat hedgehog crashing through the underbrush. They fished a little, spelled out the sporting news in the papers Halloran mailed to them, ate, slept, splashed in the pool, took their daily cross-country trot, indulged in rough horseplay and were kneaded and massaged by the solicitous Andy.

At night they shot craps by the light of their camp-fire. There was not much loose change in the crowd; what little they had was gradually but surely finding its way into Andy's pocket, later to be prudently buried by him in an old tomato can under a flat stone.

II

LABAN HULBERT had the best farm in the town. On a gentle south slope, its four hundred acres had been cleared of stump and stone by three generations until it spread sleek and green, or gorgeously red-black where turned by the plow.

In Laban's youth, with six sons to help his father, every square rod had been under cultivation save the great maples of the sugar bush on the upland, and where the white pines by the river furnished fuel and building-material. Today cattle grazed where once tasseled corn waved or Winter wheat rippled. Hulbert put down five or six acres to potatoes and his truck garden was noted; but he had ceased to be a producer in any large way.

He was a widower, and his niece Eunice, the orphan of a favorite sister, kept house for him. The third member of the household was his son Louis, an idiot with a vast, amorphous body and the mind of a four-year-old child.

Lou was harmless, generally speaking, though subject to fits of temper like any child, but rendered appalling by his great strength. He could dress and feed himself, was devoted to his father and cousin, and a faithful worker within his very narrow limits. Set to digging a well, he would have kept on until lost to sight in the hole, unless told to stop. Put to milking, he had to be watched because he would have kept steadily on long after the udders were drained. He could distinguish between weeds and vegetables, and was a tireless worker at such simple tasks as he could be trusted with; but no sharp tool was ever put into his hands.

He was an enormous creature, weighing more than three hundred pounds, and seeming to be soft and flabby, but actually endowed with the uncanny strength that Nature often bestows as a compensation upon her insane or feeble-minded children. He never left the boundaries of the Hulbert farm and was seldom out of sight of the house. Spike Halloran's four beauties never had seen him near at hand, but they often caught sight of his grotesque hulk plodding about some homely task in the distance, and joked about the "nut."

Farmer Hulbert had soberly warned them on their arrival never to plague or tease Lou.

"He ain't responsible," he said. "Gentle as a kitten, but spunky. Don't know his own strength. I don't want none of ye hurted. Can't have no suit for damages on my hands. So I warn ye. Let him be, and he'll do the same."

The quartet were highly tickled by the speech. Teasing an idiot did not in the least appeal to any of them as an indoor or outdoor sport; but the thought of the poor nut doing them any harm struck them as ludicrous. They rocked back and forth about their camp-fire that night as they imitated Hulbert's solemn warning. Their great muscles flexed, their iron hands clenched, a half-humorous, half-sinister light twinkled in their eyes.

Andy alone felt a little fear of the unfortunate. His great, expressionless face, like a mass of dough with currants stuck in for eyes and a little hole for a mouth, not unlike the crude modeling of a kitchen artist, his blubbering efforts to speak, his uncanny appetite especially, stirred the superstition never far below the Afric skin.

"Hungry is what dat Lou ain't nothin' but!" he remarked in his musical drawl. "Ah seen him eat, when Ah goes up to git aigs an' garden sass foh you-all. Lan' knows you eats *nuff*, but you'se sickly, 'pears like, 'sides what dat Lou done put inside hisself. 'Tain't nacheral, nohow!"

It was even as Andy said.

The Hulbert table, bountiful with the wholesome largess of the season, provided him with more and better food than he could have bought for ten dollars a day in the city. No limit was set to his desires, yet no one had ever seen him when he was not willing and able to eat a little more.

One day after having devoured some five or six pounds of corned beef, cabbage and the other fixings of a New England boiled dinner, topped off with half a hot apple pie and a pitcher of milk, he was noticed by his father to have seated himself on the kitchen door-step in the sun.

Beside him in a pail stood the parings of the potatoes they had eaten for dinner, ready to be carried to the pigs. Lou's great flabby hand by chance touched the mass of raw peelings. Idly he plucked one and put it in his mouth, munching it abstractedly. It tasted good; he took another, and another. While Hulbert watched, he slowly and methodically ate the entire pailful, sighed, and yawned contentedly.

"My God!" breathed Laban Hulbert; and as he was a simple, pious man, it is certain that the ejaculation was a prayer rather than an oath. But nothing untoward happened to Lou. After fifteen minutes' rest, he weeded in the hot sunshine all the afternoon, now and then picking and eating a young onion, and turned up for supper as hungry as ever.

The four athletes soon forgot poor Lou and his appetite, but they came to look for the pink apron and sunbonnet of Eunice as she moved about the distant yard after her work was done, lingering among the lofty hollyhocks, the flaming poppies and golden marigolds of her little garden.

They were all only overgrown children themselves; and as the little girl was too far away for them to gain any idea of her features, each one painted a fanciful portrait of her in his secret soul.

Sergius Stepoff sometimes sat apart from his fellows, crooning strange Cossack ballads, wild and haunting and breathing of great steppes swept by untamed riders brandishing guns with stocks inlaid with silver.

Ichyaga never sang; but his half-closed, beady black eyes saw processions of little smiling geishas, as dainty as the figures on an old Nipponese fan. 'Arry sighed gustily and recalled a blowsy barmaid in a certain pub down Whitechapel way, whom he proposed to win directly he had hammered enough Yankee welterweights to fill his pockets with a dowry.

K. O. Mooney was by far the most intelligent of the four. He had even enjoyed one year in college, from whose athletics he had been barred because of playing semi-pro baseball during the Summer vacation. Thereupon he had lost all interest in a degree and, because he was strong and clever with his hands, it was easier for him to fight than to work. Otherwise he had no special love for the game, nor much in common with his uncouth associates.

He too had his secret picture of Eunice; and it was the truest one of all, since he had managed to elude the others and stroll by the gate where her pretty, tanned face with its faintly freckled nose and blue eyes and chestnut hair looked out from over the serried ranks of hollyhocks. She did not smile, and the rudiments of flirting were unknown to her; but when the stalwart, good-looking young fellow lifted his cap, she nodded in a friendly way. She shared her father's contempt of his useless profession; but she somehow exempted him, and felt that he was more to be pitied than censured —as her favorite poem went—which would greatly have astonished K. O. could he have read the thought behind her serene blue eyes.

III

LOU never played games in the true sense of the word. Blind-man's-buff and puss-in-the-corner had a technic he could no more have grasped than he could have sensed the intricacies of chess. His life was a dull yet perfectly satisfying round of eating, working, sleeping, eating again.

Yet there were rare occasions when some dumb voice in his stricken mind urged him to a practise that approximated as near to play as he ever got. At these times he would sit down, leaving whatever job he might happen to be doing, and collect such small, loose pebbles, straws or sticks as were at hand. With them he would spend hours arranging them in meaningless patterns, not attempting anything intricate like a miniature fence or wall, but following the faint impulse which satisfied some dormant sport instinct.

At such times Hulbert never interrupted him, feeling intuitively that these strange, solitary occupations gave a little pleasure to one to whom nature had denied almost everything. Coupled with this indulgent attitude was the knowledge that Lou was very peevish if disturbed.

In general the child-man arranged his sticks and pebbles in the yard or kitchen garden. No one except his father and Eunice knew of his curious, purposeless pastime; not many had met him face to face. The erratic desire came upon him one day when he had wandered after Eunice, who was picking high bush blueberries in the north pasture for the Fall canning.

Lou himself could not be trusted to pick berries. He was willing enough; but he gathered green and rotten fruit alike, and always ended by setting down his pail and forgetting it. He wandered about this day stuffing his mouth with handfuls of berries and leaves crushed into a purple, sticky mass. Presently he found himself by the road, a quarter of a mile from the house, and out of sight of the girl. Hulbert saw him from the distant field where he was cutting a second crop of grass.

The rail fence creaked as the huge, quivering frame leaned upon it. From his eyes, expressionless as currants stuck in dough, Lou gazed upon the dusty road flowing east and west. He saw before him a number of small stones; quartz, gray fragments of granite, pebbles rounded by the tides of many generations of iron shoes and hobnailed boots. He lumbered over the topmost rail, squatted directly in the footpath, and began to gather together the crude implements of his sport.

For perhaps fifteen minutes he was absorbed in arranging the trifles in vague patterns, his flabby lips moving with the feeble simulacrum of whispered words. It was a muggy day, with a hot vapor which screened but did not mitigate the sun rays. Lou sat in the dust, the sweat running unheeded down his cheeks, the dirt caking to his moist palms in scales of mud. A curiously veined rock in the ditch beside him attracted him. It seemed desirable to him; something to round out his formless pattern. Without rising from his haunches, he crawled doglike on all fours through the young alders, to the bottom of the dry ditch.

Far up the road a pillar of dust appeared, moving steadily and at a moderate speed. As it drew nearer, a watcher might have seen, one by one, four heads, and then the upper parts of four sweater-clad bodies moving in the center of the dust cloud; and finally, bare, muscular legs ending in half socks and dirty sneakers. Spike Halloran's quartet was taking its regular morning constitutional.

The little Jap acted as pacemaker, with 'Arry treading close to his heels. Next, the big Russian plodded stolidly on, chest out, his fists clenched. K. O. Mooney followed at quite a distance, not because he found the pace at all exacting, but in the hope of exchanging a glance with Eunice while passing the Hulbert yard; which fleeting tenderness he did not wish to have his fellows note.

He did not see her in her garden; but a little later he caught the brilliant spot of color made by her sunbonnet ribbons against the dark green of a berry bush. She looked at him as he passed, and this time she smiled, a little contemptuously; but he was too far away to note anything but that she did smile. He waved a dusty hand in return and lengthened his stride to come abreast of Sergius Stepoff.

When the little ju-jutsu expert came to the straggling lines of débris scraped together by Lou, he did not recognize them for anything more than an impediment. Instinctively he shortened his stride and deftly scattered them with a sidelong sweep of his left foot just as Lou parted the alder shoots, having secured the pretty veined stone he coveted.

He had not seen nor heard the four athletes, nor did he recognize them now. He had known that there were some men living in tents at the far boundary of his father's farm. To be accurate, he had known it several times; for each time he had heard them mentioned, he promptly forgot all about it, so that every reference to them came to his rudimentary brain as fresh gossip. This is one of the advantages of being an idiot. Each morning creates a new world, and each night destroys it.

He saw his beautiful creation despitefully scattered by the foot of a stranger. With a swiftness that was uncanny considering his bulk he rose and darted forward, uttering strange, incoherent howls like those of a fretful child, greatly magnified in volume. Ichyaga paused, and the cockney bumped into his shoulder. The Russian stopped, too. As for K. O. Mooney, he was still some distance behind.

A shapeless paw reached for the Jap, whose own hands shot out swift as twin cobras, and fastened upon Lou's forearm. They were trained hands, to which the tearing apart of decks of cards and the bending of silver dollars were threadbare tricks. But on that great limb they could maintain no hold. It was like grasping a jellyfish which yields here only to bulge there. Frantically seeking something substantial to fasten to, the feet of the son of Nippon left the ground as Lou whirled about on his flat feet, arm extended. The momentum of three hundred and fifty pounds swung Ichyaga straight out, where centrifugal energy gathered him into its resistless embrace, and, his fingers slipping, he whirled through the air end over end like a pinwheel.

He landed light as a cat upon his feet, but, still urged onward, one foot caught in a tough bramble, and he stretched his full length, his head fetching up splittingly against a rock. Thenceforth he was no longer in the picture.

'Arry, undaunted by the fate of the little man, bore down on Lou with a shout. "Hit's the balmy idjit!" he cried.

His tough fists landed a dozen blows which the idiot made no attempt to avoid. But it was like striking a pillow; an operation fatiguing to the striker, but not in the least injurious to the pillow. Lou picked him up, striking and snarling like a tomcat though he was, lifted him high in air, and dashed him to the hard road, where he lay as flat and motionless as a starfish. Before Lou had even noticed Sergius, the wrestler had embraced him in a mighty hug.

The big Russian, weighing well over two hundred and a head taller than his squat opponent, was as hard as pickled rawhide. He was not only master of both Græco-Roman and catch-as-catch-can styles, but was rated by Doctor Sargent as one of the seven strongest men in the world. No sporting man would have hesitated to back him at any odds against Lou.

In grappling with the idiot however, Sergius Stepoff felt as if he were dealing with one of the great mattresses stuffed with geese feathers, under which he had slept at home during long Siberian nights. He held a squashy, evasive mass of wriggling fat, which had all the potentiality of muscle without its substance. With a quick grapevine twist he tripped him up easily enough and fell upon him as if smothered in billows of warm lard. There were no joints to wrench, no firm flesh to anchor to, no levers, no fulcrums. Lou lay upon his back without struggling and wrapped his enormous arms about the Russian, to whom it seemed that he had fallen into a nest of boa constrictors.

Suddenly, and with ease, Lou sat up, still holding Sergius clasped to his breast, and then rose to his feet. It was an almost incredible accomplishment, but he did it without so much as grunting. Then, standing erect, and holding Sergius as easily with one arm as he had been doing with both, he placed the enormous, flaccid palm of his free hand against his face, covering nose and mouth and forcing his head back. Sergius began to strangle.

All that has been told took place in the few seconds that elapsed while K. O. Mooney, after a first involuntary pause, was making up the little distance he had fallen behind. A strange nausea filled him. It was not precisely fear, although he believed that the thing that had risen unexpectedly from the ditch would probably kill and then mutilate them, one by one. It was instinctive courage and loyalty that caused him to leap forward with a cry, rather than any reliance upon his own trained muscles.

K. O. had won his nickname fairly. His full punch, delivered to the jaw, was as lethal as Jack Dempsey's. It was not as frequently delivered, because he was still a novice; but he knew that he could land it on the "button" of the idiot's lower maxillary. But what was the use? The stunning impact would deliver just the proper twist to register at the base of the brain—but that the mere pudding which served Lou for a cerebrum would feel more than a pleasant titillation, was doubtful.

Even as the thought flashed through his own alert mind, Mooney shifted his attack. His right arm dropped, his entire body crouched, every sinew and nerve and muscle taut. As they came together, the right fist—traveling from well below the knee—shot up, his body rising simultaneously to the toes, and he crashed his fist to the great nervous center known as the solar plexus.

Delivered in the ring, it would have sent any opponent to the dressing-room, to learn about it after the audience had dispersed. It might easily have killed an ordinary man not in training. Even upon the idiot it had a temporary effect. He stiffened, his mouth opened, and a curious whistle of escaping air was heard. For a brief instant Lou's wind was knocked out; but K. O. realized that it was a matter of seconds only before he would get it back again.

The Jap still lay inert; so did 'Arry. The Russian was beginning to grunt and thresh about, but Mooney knew that he could look to him for no help in time. It would all be over before he had come to.

FARMER HULBERT from his distant perch on the horse mower had seen the disturbance far below, and had instantly stopped his horse, thrown the reins over its back, and started running toward them. He arrived just as Lou, with a harsh gurgle, recovered his wind.

"L-Lou!" he panted. "Stop, Lou! Do you hear me?"

The idiot heard and turned his head. His little currant eyes—red currants now—

softened as far as it was possible for them to do so, and he smiled. At least, Mooney so read the strange grimace that distorted his dough-like face. He seemed at once to forget the strangers. Moving toward his father, he gently rubbed his stomach where K. O.'s fist had gone home.

"Lou hungry!" he gasped.

"All right; run home like a good boy! Eunice'll get ye some victuals!"

Without so much as a glance at his recent victims the idiot turned and shambled off toward home. Hulbert turned angrily toward Mooney, because he was the only listener available.

"You fellers have been pestering him!" he charged. "I warned ye not to do it!"

K. O. explained what had happened, so far as he was able. Hulbert's glance fell upon the scattered sticks and stones in the path and a gleam of understanding came to him.

"I see," he remarked. "Well, it's lucky I see it in time. The boy ain't vicious, but he don't know his own strength when he's upset."

One by one the three prostrate men rose painfully, extending their legs cautiously, feeling of heads and arms, seeking groggily to recall what it was that had happened to them. They stood aside dubiously, while Mooney faced Farmer Hulbert.

Through the young prize-fighter's brain flashed a series of pictures that were more like the waves of an intermittent current than reasoned thoughts.

That four trained athletes, representing many schools of attack and defense, should be helpless before an idiot unable to frame a sentence containing more than three words —this idea loomed in the background.

An old yearning for the soil, the stirring of generations of peasant forbears, was present. Shame was not lacking, as he looked upon Hulbert, lean, brown, bent from an unequal fight, waged alone, against drought and blight and time itself.

A pink apron—freckles and serene blue eyes beneath a sunbonnet—of course they entered in. He drew a deep breath.

"Say, Mr. Hulbert, you don't want to hire a green hand, do you?"

The old man's eyes held his eagerly, almost hungrily.

"If eighty dollars a month, a clean bed and all ye can eat is any inducement, I do!"

K.O. turned to where his three training-mates stood in a forlorn little group.

"Trot along to camp, boys! I'm through," he said. "Tell Andy that I'll write Spike. Me, I'm going to go to work!"

THE DESERT SLEEPS

by Forrestine C. Hooker

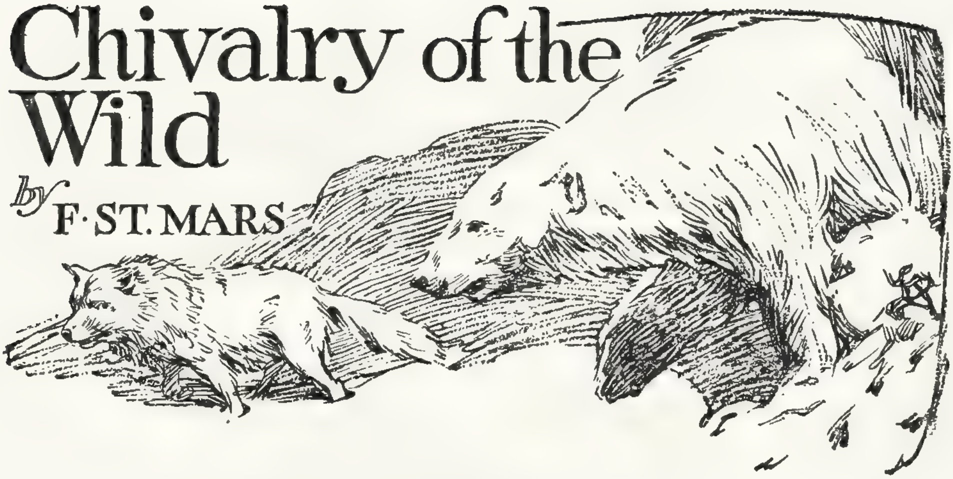
THE desert sleeps. Like ghostly sentinels
Gaunt cacti weirdly stand
Where no foot treads, and no eye ever reads
The story writ on sand.

Half-buried, scattered bones; a grinning skull
That jeers man's pigmy day;
Its eyeless sockets watch coyotes halt,
Then, hungry, slink away.

Frail fingers tell the rosary of years
(A woman waits and weeps.)
The desert clasps him to its shriveled breast
And, sated, calmly sleeps.

Chivalry of the Wild

by F. ST. MARS



Author of "Goomasaka Makes Good," "Haunters of the Heights," etc.

IT WAS scarcely night, and one could not call it day. It was not twilight, and nobody could mistake it for dawn. It was just itself, all blindingly white everywhere except the sky, and that was like a deep, unbroken lake. If there was anything more horrible than the white, it was the cold.

There was no such thing as time in that place, because there was no such thing as day. Only at intervals "the northern lights came down to dance on the houseless snow," and at certain periods—when the wind was that way—came the fretful, yearning sound of the waves breaking somewhere on the ice very far out from shore.

One might have taken it for granted that nothing was alive in that place; but really Nature has few corners of her realm where nothing can live.

From the far dimness over the ice offshore a harsh note cut into the mutter of the sea now and then; and there were burrows under the snow in some places which had not been made by the "snow devils."

There was something else, too, not a "snow devil," though it looked just as intangible and was just as white, hurrying backward and forward and up and down in front of the place where the holes in the snow were. It might have been some spirit sentinel of the north, just on guard there before the holes.

It was, as a matter of fact, a fox, white as the pallid world around it, all wrapped up in swath upon swath of spotless fur, even to the soles of his dainty paws, and absolutely snow-hued from head to heel, and from cheek ruff to tip of his fine white brush, except only for the very tip of his short, sharp nose, and that was black.

What he was doing there all alone would have been hard for a watcher to tell. But he knew. There were bushes under the snow, and those bushes bore berries, and for the sake of the berries, and around the bushes, the ptarmigan had driven tunnels in the snow when it was soft. But the snow was soft no longer; and so far as the fox was concerned those fat, white birds might have been in a fort. They knew it. So did the fox know it; that was why he was trotting up and down like that, thinking the problem out in his canine way. For he had to live.

Finally he tried one hole, then another, scratching with the fury of a rabbiting terrier, snorting, whining and squeezing in as far as he could. When he had squeezed too far into one hole and nearly got himself jammed and trapped for life—which wouldn't have been long in that climate—he finally gave that notion up and stood with forelegs apart, staring about him over the unbroken white.

Then he jumped exactly one yard in one second, and raced another six in about another three seconds as if he had been struck by a sword in that instant.

Within three feet of him, over the top of the hummock of snow which covered the bushes, there had risen, exactly like a demon from a trap, a head and a neck about as big as the whole of that arctic fox, brush and all, and ten times more massive. The head was dirty yellow except for its little eyes, but most of it seemed to be composed of very red mouth, wide open, and of yellow fangs that gleamed. After the head came a paw, broad enough and clawy enough to brain anything almost, and—well, the fox felt the draft from it, as he was in mid-jump, as it fairly whistled over the very spot where he had been standing.

That represented one polar bear delivering his final ultimatum of war upon one poor little white arctic fox, which he had been stalking for the past half-hour.

The polar bear was a dirty yellow, and not the stereotyped picture-book pure white, and he was in a vile temper. Noting these things, the fox removed another forty yards before he sat down on his hams, dog fashion, and yapped a lonely, guttural little yap upon the stillness.

He knew that bear; at least he knew his character, and knew everything that was conceivably bad of him, for it is only the gaunt, yellow old male bears that mooch about and keep active during the Winter. The rest are under the snow, hibernating, and these nomads of the frozen wastes are as crusty as it is possible for a naturally crusty beast to be in a land where if you do not hibernate in Winter you had better go and drown yourself and have finished with it, for there is next to no chance of finding anything to eat.

When the fox dodged the blow, the bear hauled his immense, loose-jointed bulk up over the hummock and sniffed like a young gas-engine at the holes in the snow. Then he began to dig and tear at them, and the sight of that digging would have turned any coal-miner white with envy. It was like about ten badgers, plus eight pigs, plus a few entrenching tools, and every now and then the great beast would pause to snort up those tunnels like a suction pump.

The arctic fox left off yapping, and silently trotted nearer. Envy and exasperation were oozing out all over him from every hair on end, and his flat ears said so.

The bear turned with a "Whuff!" to warn off the fox once or twice and went back to his digging, and the fox continued his watching and his abusive yapping till the bear had nearly dug himself out of sight under the snow. Then suddenly there came a burst and a rush as if, almost, the bear had in his digging touched off a land-mine and it had blown up, hurling lumps of snow everywhere into the sky.

The lumps of snow, however, were ptarmigan, and the bursting noise was made by their frenzied leap aloft, with confusion of whirring wings, from the mouth of the burrow they had been driven to as the great white bear approached. One only was left; that one, cut off in a "blind" tunnel, was in the jaws of the bear.

The arctic fox ran like a fleeting wraith across the dreary white, on and on, in the direction the ptarmigan had taken, for he knew they must stop somewhere, and when they stopped would be stalkable. He did not notice that it was beginning to snow, or that the wind had taken on a new and more vicious voice. He did not notice that the white ptarmigan were becoming harder and harder to see among the thickening, hurrying flakes, till suddenly he saw them turn from their northward course, swing, circle round and come back, hugging the ground and going like the wind.

He heard the wind, saw the landscape blotted out in a striding curtain of white, and crouched flat, right in the path of the speeding birds.

IT WAS a beautiful leap, straight up, a clear four feet, and timed to the fraction of a second. There was a whir of wings overhead, a clash of fangs, a squawk, and then fox and ptarmigan came down together. And in the same instant the blizzard was upon them.

The fox could do no more than lie upon his prey and gasp. It seemed as if the wind would rip the very breath out of him, and he could see barely more than a yard in any direction. There was also ice among the snow, big, jagged lumps of it that would cut your eye out if they hit there.

The ice could not hurt through the fox's layer upon layer of soft, white, thick fur, but he kept his head well out of the way between his neat paws, and shut his eyes. It was the only thing he could do.

It must have been some time about then that the apparition in black fell over him, blundered right on top of him as it staggered its way blindly through the white inferno. Being a wild creature, it sank its fangs into his shoulder first, bounced clear of the return compliment next and stopped to find out who he was afterward. That meant it was frightened, though it did not appear so.

It was the arctic fox who was the surprized beast, though, for the thing was black—or at least if it wasn't black it looked like it. As a matter of fact it was a sort of blue-black from nose-tip to tail-point, and if anything it was wrapped to the eyes in even more fur than the arctic fox.

Black things were unusual in that white place, and for a reason. It wasn't healthy to be arrayed in black. Black showed up miles off, and advertised the wearer too much to the hungry.

The arctic fox had not seen a living black creature, bird or beast, since the snow came nearly half a year ago, and he nearly fell over himself with astonishment. Also he snarled and snapped, being frightened, too.

Then the snarl and snap were echoed in his ear; and he was aware, *via* a sharp, burning pain in his back, that in watching the first apparition out of the storm he had committed a blunder. He had allowed the second to fall over him as well.

He rolled over twice, snapping about six times in the process, and was up on to his feet, all in less than half a second; but the wind blew him flat again, and he crouched, staring at the second black one.

His eyes, however, opened wide; and he stretched forward, bristling and snarling and wicked to behold. The wind whipped the snarl from his jaws again; but the other, who had calmly pounced upon the ptarmigan, knew what he meant by his looks, for it darted clear, and the arctic fox dropped on his prey, facing the strangers, and, worse luck, the storm.

He could just see his assailants, two dark shapes in the restless, hurrying white, half-crouched, up to their bellies in snow, and their eyes gleaming. He saw the flash of their fangs and he knew that they snarled.

But it was the light in their eyes that held him. If ever he knew starvation he saw it in those eyes. Those beasts had reached that point when they held their lives for sale in exchange for a mouthful of food. They were desperate—mad. They would stop at nothing.

And the little, round, muffled, spotless arctic fox, watching them narrowly, weighed his chances and did not find them rosy. Two to one is long odds in the wild.

The first rush came five minutes later, when the wind gave a little. The arctic fox rose to meet it, right up on his hind legs, and so did the other. For a moment they grappled with inconceivable ferocity, forearm to forearm, jaw against jaw. They executed some lightning play with their teeth, and then in a flash the other had him by the neck.

That, however, did not worry the arctic fox; the other was at full liberty to get his fangs through our friend's fine, thick ruff, if he could and was given time to do so. He could not, however, and was given no time at all, for instantaneously the arctic fox pinned him by the foreleg. There was a yell of anguish, and the other wrenched away.

Then the blizzard came on with more raging accompaniments, a new set, worse than before, and both combatants could only crouch and breathe through their noses.

The arctic fox groveled, nearly blinded, and felt for his ptarmigan with his nose. Then he quivered and jerked back, for he had touched another nose, wet and cold, as well as feathers; and the owner of that other nose was an arctic fox too—of the gentler sex. Not that you'd have known it by the way she tried to snap the white one's nose literally off. Indeed, they were both arctic foxes, those two black ones—or rather blue ones.

The white arctic fox made a little friendly, whining noise to the lady who owned that muzzle. He thought she could hear it, but she could not. And moreover he made no attack upon her. She guzzled and tore like a mad thing in a cloud of white feathers and white snow whirling about her head.

The white arctic fox could just see her head through the fog. He watched her eat, and snatched a wing only—just one wing out of all the bird that was his. He made no attempt to recover the rest, but when the other, who was bigger and self-evidently the female's consort, throwing chivalry to the winds, made an effort to recover not only the rest but the whole bird, he found the white one crouched in front of him, ready and dangerous.

He drew off and circled round, crawling on his belly, a faint smudge in the night; and as he circled the white fox pivoted, keeping himself between his black foe and the famished female thing.

THE day came at last to that place, and the blizzard blew away with the dawn, but the cold was worse than ever, if that were possible.

Each fox had made for itself a sort of little "coopy hole" in the new soft snow, with just room to poke out its head, and each about five yards apart. They lay curled up there, three furry round balls asleep, or as much asleep as an arctic fox ever gets.

The white fox was the first to make a move. He got up, shook himself, and then washed from head to heel. The blue female was the next, and she also performed a careful toilet. The big blue male was the last, but he too performed his sulky, though thorough, ablutions.

Then the white fox got up and sniffed the air, and away he went down the slope toward the shore. The female followed, because she knew with bitter knowledge the meaning of the law which orders the survival of the fittest. She was blue and conspicuous, but her experience of the night before had taught her to follow this white fellow.

The blue male followed, because he would otherwise have been left alone. He did it without joy. Also he bided his chance.

The going was abominable. About an hour's progress, much of it jumping, took them the long distance out from shore over the ice to open water. They knew they were coming there by the increasing roar in the air, and by that other roar—the pounding of ice upon ice.

Suddenly the white fox stuck fast and rigid in his tracks. The other two followed suit. All three could see the black spot upon the white ice. All three knew that it was a scoter duck resting; for good swimmer and diver though she be, even she could be drowned by her native sea in its anger.

For four minutes they remained thus, tense and watching. Then the white fox circled slowly out and round.

The other two knew what his move was. He was going to get between the duck and her mother sea, for which she would surely make when in danger; and he did it, too, mainly by reason of his white coat, which made him nearly invisible.

He had just about reached the point he had aimed for, and turned to stalk the prey when he realized that the male blue arctic fox was already stalking her from the shore side. But the white one could afford to smile. The black diving duck sat facing inland, and she was watching the blue foe for all his cunning, every inch of the way.

When he crawled to within twenty yards she rose and flew heavily, feet trailing and low, back to the sea.

The white fox had vanished. He had sunk, melted into the snow—flat. Nobody saw him in fact until he rose, as it were a lump of the very snow, right under the duck, shooting clean up into the air with a fine spring.

The clean snap could be heard a good many yards away as his jaws closed on her legs, and the little confusion could also be heard as she and he came down in a flapping heap together.

Then the two blue foxes raced, bounding mightily over the soft snow.

The white fox saw them coming, and slew and fed as much as he could with that fierce swiftness which those learn who have many rivals, so that he had eaten almost a third of his catch before the female fox arrived.

She made no ceremony, but charged down upon him, snarling and snapping fiendishly. He snarled and snapped, too.

Just for one moment he held his ground, chivalry battling within him with canine hunger. Then he stood aside.

But when the blue male, famishing and throwing chivalry to the winds again, dodged and made to charge in upon the female, he found the white male in front. Give up his meal—if not too hard-pressed—to a female perhaps; but to a male— Well, he must fight for it.

That blue male did fight—very well, but on an empty stomach.

The white one, thanks partly to his white coat and thanks also to a natural cunning and to sticking to known ground, was almost plump. It was a deadly little passage at arms while it lasted, and the white fox finished with a red smear or two on his spotless fur; but he won. The rival was driven off, beaten on points only, though—not knocked out yet.

The white fox, however, did not wait longer than a tongue takes to lick flesh-wounds clean and to set fur in order. In a very short while he was off again, heading this time for the land, the others following.

This time the white brute traveled five miles before he stopped, and then it was at piled rocks, just showing here and there in slabs where the wind had blown them clear of snow.

A snow-white falcon of gigantic proportions was sitting on one upthrust, jagged wolf-fang of rock, and a herd of wild-eyed, shaggy musk-oxen was feeding, by some miracle of their own devising, at its base. Neither took any notice of the foxes. Nor the foxes of them.

The white fox hunted about for a time, sniffing carefully, and then began to scrape.

In time he discovered a cranny among the rocks, and out of this he succeeded in pulling forth what looked like a dark lump of ice. It was in reality a dead and frozen diving bird, and he crouched down with it between his paws and began to lick and thaw it. Then he fed.

The female went to the cranny and repeated the maneuver. She was in point of fact helping herself from the white fox's freezing-room, so to speak, where he had stored many creatures slain during the short Summer.

The blue male went to the cranny, and whipped around just in time to meet the white male. And then they really fought. They fought for ten minutes, and when it was over the blue rival went away, slowly and weakly, fading from a beast to a dot, and from a dot to nothing; and every few yards of the way he could have been tracked by carmine, glaring spots upon the snow.

The white fox was red, too, but not red enough to matter, and he returned to his meal.

The female looked from one to the other, sighed, as all the dog tribe can, and—stayed. It seemed that the white lover had asked her to, and Nature had demanded also. She was no fool, and saw clearly in this white mate a case of the survival of the fittest.

STEAMBOATS IN UTAH

by H. P.

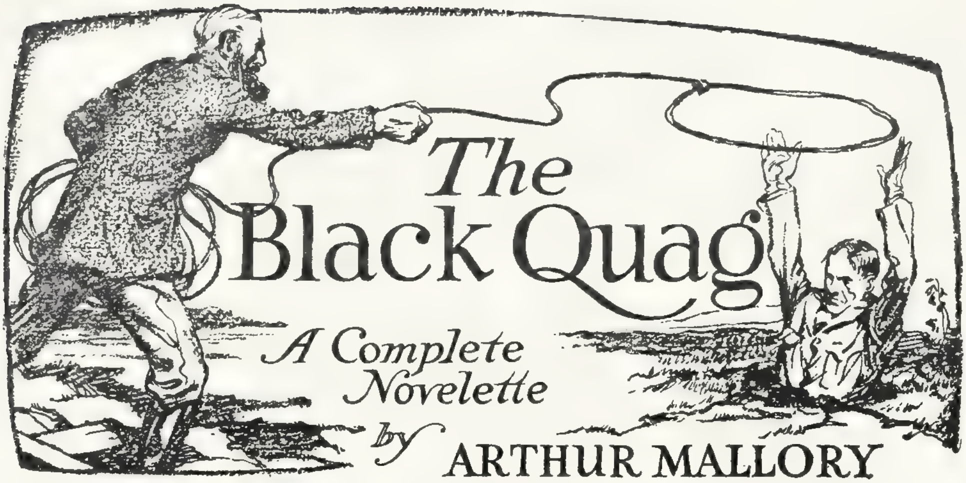
WHEN Lieutenant N. Michler was working on the United States-Mexican boundary survey in 1856 he was for some time at Fort Yuma, southeastern California and at the junction of the Colorado and the Gila. The site of the post was a bleak hill, having no vegetation except the euphorbia, "a rank poison," but which, he says, was used by Indians as an antidote for rattlesnake bite. At that time it was proposed to establish steamboat service on the Colorado—under a Government appropriation—for the purpose of opening water communication with the Mormon Territory—Utah—and do away with the long and dangerous plains trip.

That this plan for penetrating the Mormon country at the headwaters of the Colorado and bring the exports of the territory down the river into the Gulf of California was favorably considered and deemed possible is shown by the activity of speculators. While Micheler was at Fort Yuma, "Colorado City" was laid out—on paper—situated across the river from the military post. It was surveyed and the streets and blocks marked out, and what was worth while to the enthusiastic promoters many lots were sold.

Near the post was Chimney Peak, a solitary rock rising five hundred feet above the range on which it stands. The Indians call it Avie Mil-li-ket, after one of their chiefs, who became a deity after his death, says Michler. This is unusual as there is no evidence to show the American Indians were ever ancestor-worshipers.

Their implicit belief that they were swayed and controlled by external forces, by magic powers and spirits, would seem to make it impossible for their minds to conceive of one of their own weak, helpless people attaining to the dignity of a god.

However, Mil-li-ket sleeps in a large cavern, a raccoon in the entrance, and footprints can be seen—so it's said—in the path from the cave to the river. When his people sin his slumbers are disturbed and he turns over, and white men foolishly call it an earthquake. The mountain grave is the Mecca of the Indians of that locality; rather, it was threescore years ago.



The Black Quag

A Complete Novelette

by ARTHUR MALLORY

CHAPTER I

THE QUAG

BEFORE beginning my tale, let me admit its faults. I am no author, but a country doctor; moreover, this story is not fiction, but, in its small way, history. Wherefore I am hampered not only by stubborn facts but also by my own inability to weave them plausibly together.

Reviewing my characters, I find a villain, safe enough; and a very authentic villain, make no doubt of that. And Mary Belle Hume, perhaps, might serve as heroine; but I have no hero. Or rather, my hero is not a man, but a swamp.

Ah! That clarifies my narrative. This, then, is the tale of a personal conflict between Isaac Hand, known among railroad men as "Lily-White" Hand, and the Black Quag. And now I can begin as I should, with my principal character.

The Black Quag, then, forms the floor of Black River Valley. It is flat as your hand; a full mile wide and three miles long. From its eastern edge, Cranberry Hill rises gradually; a long, long ridge, round-topped like a Maxfield Parrish picture, checkered in squares of corn and oats and woodland. Opposite, West Hill leaps straight up to the huge, half-finished house we villagers call Apperson's Folly. The little town of Black Valley hugs its foot, crowded between the Quag below and the private desolation of the Folly above, and seeming to shrink equally from both.

Below us, and to the eastward, lies the Black Quag, to all seeming—and indeed—the best land for miles around. Down through its middle runs the little winding creek named the Black River in an older and more generous day, edged with low willow bushes, cat-tails and swamp grass. Here are obvious sink-holes, lip-full of semi-liquid mud, to engulf unwary cattle. But for the most part the Quag is fertile, arable land, without a stone, where the soil falls back from the plowshare in lengthening ribbons of satiny black—a sight to gladden the farmer's eye.

Phenomenal crops are grown upon the Black Quag; corn and oats and beans, waist-high timothy hay that yields four tons to the acre and clogs the mower-sections with its bulk.

This is no swamp, you say, but good, firm land. Wait; you do not know it as we have learned to know it—and to fear it. For in these fertile fields are swales where, in wet seasons, men cradle their grain and swing the scythe among the lush meadow grasses as did our fathers; hollows where binder and mowing-machine dare not venture, lest they be swallowed up. There is land that lies in pasture because men fear to plow it; there are bits of honest-seeming land fenced tightly off lest so much as a yearling shoat should enter.

Along the creek are many little willows; here and there upon the Quag stand saplings;

but in all that three square miles there is no tree to shade a rabbit. The Quag will not tolerate a tree.

And men building fence dig their post-holes shallowly and with caution; and to every post, at ground level, a wide board is fastened flatwise on either side. Our people have lived with the Quag this hundred years and more; they have heard its voice in many a Spring night. And despite its frank and open face, they know it for a treacherous, secret morass with the maw of a Moloch.

Sixscore years ago, when Valley Forge was not yet fully history, but a raw scar in the mind of many a living man, old Simon Black—young Simon then—came westward through the Holland Patent. He carried a long squirrel rifle, I suppose, and wore a coonskin cap; and his moccasined feet trod virgin forest hereabouts. His, they say, was the first eye to see our valley save as a hunting-ground.

Here Simon halted. Here was cleared land in plenty; three square miles without a tree. I can imagine him kneeling, all ignorant, upon the very bosom of the Quag, stag-horn knife in one hand, a square of thick sod in the other, gloating upon the fat, bared earth.

Simon Black preempted the valley and gave it his name; a name more fitting than he knew. He would be huntsman no longer, but a freeholder in his own right. He laid aside the rifle for the ax, hewed a wagon-track through the forest to this oasis, threw up a temporary shack and then hurried back to the settlements.

Another Spring, and he returned, more slowly now, and goad in hand, on the nigh side of his own ox-yoke. He was a proud man then, I make no doubt, and his thoughts raced ahead of the sedate draft-oxen and back to the creaking wain beside him, wherein his good wife sat upon a pile of household goods, nursing Simon junior. He headed a little caravan, for sundry bold neighbors had been caught by his urgings. Why not? There was land enough for all. He would found a settlement of his own, would Simon Black.

And so in the late Summer they reached what was already named Black Valley. And here they outspanned and fell to work, rolling up log houses at the forest-edge.

But Simon himself had a bolder plan. His was the best land; was he not the pioneer? Let others live in shacks; Simon would build himself a house, right in the heart of his fat acres. All that Fall he felled great trees and shaped them; and when sleighing came his oxen snaked hewn logs down to a growing pile at the creek-side, in the very heart of the Black Quag.

The Seneca Indians had a long house thereabouts; young bucks came to watch, shook their heads and went away. And then a chief came; an old man, arrow-straight, with a seamed, wise face. These Indians had no feud with the settlers; after due pause, the chief addressed Simon Black gravely and in friendly wise.

THIS was his message, conveyed between the Seneca tongue, broken English and much sign-talk: that a devil abode beneath the flats; a very bad Manitou; that the white man must build upon the hillside and not here, or the devil would be angry and cry out. And then— He finished with a curious gesture of joined flat hands, palms down, which spread apart and came together again silently.

"Hau!" said the chief. "I have spoken."

Simon laughed, being a hardy man who feared no devils; and he went on through all that Winter.

Spring came; the snows melted and the ground gave up its frost. Simon Black named a day for his log-rolling; he shot wild turkeys and set aside much corn whisky. The neighbors came from fifty miles around; the women brewed and baked and roasted turkeys and venison, and the men worked and drank—both mightily.

So in three days the Black house went up; a mansion. It was a double log house, with a covered passageway between two huge rooms, and a lean-to kitchen at the back; men marveled at such luxury and made rude jests and finished the whisky and rode away, each with his wife and children.

As they went, the ground moved briefly beneath them, as a horse moves his skin in fly-time, and they heard a horrid subterranean rumbling, like Satan playing at bowls in hell. Being well filled with corn whisky, they laughed, Simon loudest. But more than one woman rode for long with chin on shoulder, recalling the Indian's tale.

Simon Black built three chimneys and daubed them well with mud, and roofed his new house with shakes and floored it with puncheons; and all that while the Quag held its peace.

And at last the house was done, and a log stable behind it for the oxen. Simon Black got him more corn whisky, keg after keg. He sent sixty miles after a very famous fiddler and himself rode far and wide to invite all and sundry to his house-warming on All-Fools' Day.

That was a gala day for red and white. Then, in mid-afternoon, while men wrestled, ran and leaped for prizes, the Quag spoke once more. It made a ghastly mutter underneath their feet; too deep for sound, heart-shaking, indescribable.

Runners and leapers stopped; wrestlers stood frozen in postures of strain, like Greek statues. Dead silence fell.

A ring of impassive, blanket-wrapped Indians surrounded the merrymakers, their old chief a step in advance. At the voice of the Quag each Indian fumbled at his breast, stealthily opened his medicine-bag.

"Hau!" said the chief, and made the sign of a last farewell to his host.

Blanket over his face, he turned away; a lengthening line of bucks followed his swift steps in Indian file; and the uneasy settlers were left alone.

Then Simon Black laughed boisterously.

"Shucks, boys!" he roared. "No Injun devil can buck white medicine. Drink hearty!"

He passed the jug and men drank deep and presently resumed their sports.

Night came; a black Spring night with low-hung stars. The fiddler resined his bow and greased his elbow, and hardy frontiersmen trooped into Simon Black's new house, snatched wives and sweethearts and fell to dancing. Their moccasined feet thumped softly on the puncheon floor.

So for an hour or two. Then a neighbor—it was Grandma Perkins' grandfather, they say—whirled down the line of a Virginia reel, stumbled and fell and slid right into a corner.

All roared with laughter, clapping their hands.

"Ed Burlingame's drunk!" they chanted.

But Ed rose slowly, shaking his head.

"Simon," he accused, "cain't you lay a puncheon floor at your age? This here's plumb outa plumb."

"You lie!" roared Simon Black and stopped to look.

Suddenly every one saw that the floor did slope, like the deck of a ship close-hauled.

The music stopped short; the dancers stood at gaze, open-mouthed. And in that sudden pause the Quag spoke once more, shuddering, deeply cavernous, triumphant.

Some one tugged at the slanting door, wedged in its jambs; wrenched it open and looked out. And the solid earth stood breast-high above the threshold, and the air was full of tiny sucking, bubbling noises; hungry sounds.

"My ——!" he bawled. "Let's get outa here!"

Somehow—anyhow—they scrambled out and fled, for the fear of the Quag was upon them. From the locked stables came the plunging screams of maddened horses, the horrid bawling of oxen; but they fled like Lot from this new Gomorrah and none dared look back.

Next morning Simon and his bolder neighbors ventured down upon the flat. There was no house, no stable. The Quag lay bare and placid, glutted, fed with four yoke of oxen, twoscore horses. And where the house had been a great sink-hole yawned, full thirty yards across; an open maw, lip-full of thick, black slime that bubbled sluggishly.

It was then that the Black Quag got its name and the fear of it which has lasted to this day. For it was—and is—a skin of earth lying upon a bottomless slough; anywhere upon its surface one may dig five feet, or four, or less, through good, firm, stoneless soil, and find beneath a vile black mud that bubbles presently up to fill your excavation.

Here is the tale of the Black Quag's naming, as I had it from old Grandma Perkins, who heard it first-hand at her own grandfather's knee. A legend, if you like; but to this day, in the Quag's center, is a huge round sink-hole, tight-fenced against man and beast. And all of us call it "Sim's Hole," not knowing why. Deacon Smith told me that once, when he was young, the old men used to call it by another name, at times, "The Black House Hole."

Legend or truth, it grips; and I, for one, believe it. But then, I know the Quag. And out of that legend rose another, which our old men still whisper when the frost comes out of the ground in Spring and the Quag groans.

It cries out for a victim, they say; in Spring the appetite which Simon Black's cattle once sated reawakes. And then the Quag must be fed, lest a worse thing befall us. And they sigh with relief—and I with them—when a Black, or a Burlingame, or a Perkins comes long-faced for his morning's mail to say—

"We-ell, the Quag took a heifer las' night"—or a hog, or even a hen.

Then we rejoice, and inly, the animal's owner with us; for now, we say, the Quag is safe until next year.

All superstition, of course. But this I know: that every Spring for the sixteen Springs of my practise in Black Valley, when the ice goes out and the rains come and the earth gives up her frost and the roads are axle-deep, the Black Quag has spoken once, and more than once. And when steer or calf or dog—once it was a little boy—blunders into a sink-hole and is swallowed up, the Quag is mute for another season.

CHAPTER II

THE NEW RAILROAD

FOR a hundred and twenty years the Black Quag retained its sullen independence, stedfastly resisting the encroachments of mankind. Gradually our people came to know the limits of its forbearance, and to respect them.

Its broad bosom might be cropped with impunity; cattle might pasture there, and the Quag exacted only its yearly tribute of the herds. Thus far ran the tolerance of our farmers' lease—and no farther.

But no man might build upon the Quag; and, with Simon Black's experiment in mind, no man attempted it. The Quag would not bear with any work of man, were it no more than a haystack; that the Burlingames proved fifty years ago, and lost the yield of their meadows. It was swallowed up. Save through the sink-holes by the creek, men might go over the Quag in safety, and horses; but in the swales, the tenderer folds of its thin skin, farm machines might not venture.

Jerome Perkins defied this prohibition and lost his new reaper and binder and three good horses, and himself escaped by an eyelash. Not even Nature might yoke the Black Quag; it lay flat and bare and treeless now as when old Simon first found it. Saplings there were in plenty; and by the creek long lines of stunted willow bushes; but no tree to shade so much as a child. They took root and grew, and thrived in that fat soil; and then some Spring the Quag felt their weight.

Flood water never covered the Black Quag but ran beneath its skin of earth. And it washed at the tree-roots from below, and snow-water loosened them from above, and so the Quag worked silently, disdaining to lift its voice for such a morsel. Today a tree fifteen feet high, perhaps, its green buds already leaving out; tomorrow it was a trunkless bush, hugging the ground, and next day it was gone. And a dry August would parch up the sink-hole it had left, and so no trace of it remained.

Such was the Black Quag. Is it any wonder that we shook our heads in doubt when the surveyors came and ran their lines straight through its midriff, lengthwise, saying that there should be a railroad there?

We had a railroad; the old N. Y. & O., built in the sixties. But it had been built by local men who knew the Quag and feared it; and its grade hugged the foot of West Hill all down the valley, running over firm ground where rock was never more than twenty feet below the grass-roots. But now the great Ontario System planned a new line; a freight cut-off to level grades and straighten curves and bring a million tons of coal and oil up to Buffalo more quickly.

Eighty miles long was this new division, and plotted out, I fancy, somewhat as the old Czar is said to have planned his roads. Some railroad monarch five hundred miles away set his ruler upon the map, one end at Buffalo and one at Coal City, and drew his railroad by its edge. Were there mountains? Tunnel them! Valleys? Fill them in! Rivers? Bridge them! But make our roadbed straight and flat, that we may save three mills upon a ton of freight and grow richer thereby.

Such were the orders under which the surveyors worked, and such the orders Warren Roberts, chief constructing engineer of the new division, brought with him. And, no doubt, all such estimated expense would have been the truest economy; but they failed to take into account the Black Quag.

Warren Roberts, I say, was in charge of the work; a tall young man in riding-breeches and puttees, black-eyed and handsome. But Warren Roberts can not serve me for a hero. Indeed, maugre the wrath of Mary Belle, I must declare that he showed himself a bit of an ass.

But that comes later. Let me first hurry through with my insensate forces—although to me the Black Quag is more than that; it is alive—and come to my humans before you tire of me.

THE railroad came, then. The end-of-track pushed out of both Buffalo and Coal City at once, and crept clanking forward upon mechanical track-layers, behind a screen of scraper-teams and snorting steam-shovels. Now and again it came almost up with the hard-rockmen who rode their throbbing tripods along some obstructing ledge; but always there would be a final salvo of blasts, a great oath-driven scurrying of muckers—and the end-of-track crept serenely on, unhindered. Warren Roberts got great credit thereby; and deserved it. He was a good engineer.

From the first he had made his headquarters in Black Valley, almost equidistant from the termini of the new division; and now, as March drew into April and the finished road-bed on either side crept almost to the borders of the Black Quag, he was with us all the time.

That was an admirable arrangement, to his thinking; it gave him so many evenings for Mary Belle Hume, his fiancée. Perhaps I do the boy injustice; but I think that in his first flush of accepted love Roberts forgot, or thought too lightly of, the Black Quag.

At any rate, the clanking track-layers crept on and on, eating up long rows of surveyor's stakes, with no more provisions for mastering the Quag than would serve to fill and grade any three-mile stretch of flat meadow-land.

It was an error. Our old men—Blacks and Burlingames, Putnams and Elliots—spoke portentously to construction foremen and engineers. The former listened, such as were hardened conquerors of the stubborn Earth and knew her whims; but the engineers laughed carelessly, and Warren Roberts with them. They confounded us with argument, citing "bottomless" lakes and ponds no more than fifty feet deep by the plumb-line, dreaded quicksands which had succumbed to a few hundred car-loads of crushed stone. They even let down a sounding-line into Sim's Hole; and when the piano-wire began to coil on its surface after eighty feet or so had been let out, they laughed again.

"Cut it and buoy it out," suggested Simon Black, third of that ilk, who could study the sink-holes and foretell the Quag's outcrying days in advance. "Buoy it out, an' come back t'morrow."

So they did, still laughing; and came back. But they found neither wire nor buoy. And whatever other tests they made to satisfy themselves I do not know; but they took no warning from this thing.

CHAPTER III

THE COMING OF LILY-WHITE HAND

IT WAS the eighth of April, as I remember well, and I had been up most of the night before.

But that is a country doctor's life; and so, when an early call came from that one of the Ontario's construction camps which bordered the Black Quag upon the south, I went to answer it as a matter of course. True, I was busy enough without this extra work; but our farmers pay more slowly than their corn grows. Wherefore I did not scorn to doctor the railroad's men—at railroad prices; the regular county scale, multiplied by—but these are secrets of the profession.

I found an Italian with a stomachache, induced by a diet of deaconed veal, dosed him with paregoric and started home again. Passing by the engineers' office, I saw Warren Roberts enter it, and stopped. The Ontario System had let no contracts; it did its own construction, and young Roberts not only supervised but managed the work. He hired and fired; he was the big boss in truth. So I went in to him for an O.K. of my voucher; I needed the money.

Roberts looked drawn and weary; there were dark circles beneath his eyes. He had been out to a dance.

As we talked, there came a knock upon the office door. It opened, and a man came in.

I noticed first his eyes, which were pale gray and narrow, set in a sharp white face. They were blank, empty eyes, of an unchanging, ophidian stare. I did not like them—or him.

He chose Roberts at once.

"Well, chief," he began, "how about a job of work?"

The engineer looked him over, and so did I. We saw a man of the middle height; a spare, lean figure, and very square-shouldered. He wore high laced boots of elkskin, khaki riding-breeches and jacket, much washed and faded, but scrupulously clean. And the green-gray boots, bleached khaki and gray felt hat seemed to reproduce and render menacing the gray-green of his eyes. His sharp, clean-shaven face was colorless; his hair was an indeterminate flaxen, streaked with gray; the whole man seemed shadowy, neutral.

"What's your line?" asked Roberts.

I can not say that the stranger smiled. His thin lips did not move; his eyelids did not move. Indeed, I never saw him wink—but twice. It was only that those cold eyes lighted from within, as if a murky fire blazed up behind gray glass.

"Anything," he answered evenly. His voice, too, was colorless; but now it rang thinly, sardonically. "You don't know me. I am Isaac Hand."

His hand went to an inner pocket; and I saw that he wore thick gloves, green-gray like the rest of him. He produced a thick packet of papers, slipped off a rubber band and passed them to Roberts.

The engineer glanced at them.

"Sorry, Mr. Hand—" and now he spoke as to an equal—"We've nothing that would interest you, I'm afraid."

Hand shivered. The Spring air was still chill enough, and he was thinly clad.

"Anything," he repeated. "I'm on my uppers."

He shrugged indifferently.

Roberts hesitated a moment.

"Well—we need a timekeeper, over at Number Two."

The other's lips opened a little, and he laughed, thinly, mirthlessly, so that I flinched at the sound of it. I had been hoping that Warren would send the fellow away, for I fancied that I knew the type. And now I prayed inwardly that he might refuse this trifling job, for that laugh confirmed my diagnosis. Here was a born trouble-maker; and we had had trouble in plenty at Black Valley—and the Quag was still unconquered.

"Right, chief," said Isaac Hand. "It's a meal-ticket. Give me a chit to your foreman."

He took the note and departed to Camp Number Two, a hundred yards away. I lingered a moment, striving to frame a warning, to state cogently my belief that the man should be rejected, or at least watched closely.

But the matter was taken out of my hands. I heard a heavy tread without and Michael O'Shaughnessy appeared; a huge, grizzled Irishman, canny veteran of a hundred railroad camps. The man's broad face was redder than his hair; his gnarled fists clenched and unclenched; he gnawed at his mustache, muttering ominously.

"—— it, sorr!" he burst out, and stopped to take a fresh grip of himself. "Mister Roberts, ar-re you just afther hirin' Lily-White Hand?"

His voice accused. Roberts straightened, frowning in his pride of youth.

"I've hired Mr. Isaac Hand as timekeeper, yes!" he answered crisply.

"But, sorr! Ye wudn't— Wait, now! Ye dunno this man. I seen him afore, manny's the time. Lily-White Hand, —— him! Lissen, now, b'y; I cud tell ye——"

"That'll do, Mike!" Roberts' voice rang sharp. "He's hired; and he goes to work."

"But, sorr—the man's got a divil!"

Roberts laughed irritably.

"What of it? I can handle him. If he does his work, good; if not, I'll fire him like anybody else."

I do not excuse the boy. He should have listened to the words of the older man, wise in the ways of railroad camps, but he did not. He had been up all night, and now he was weary, irritable, over-anxious to show his authority. And yet, if he had listened—would the Black Quag be bridled today?

Old Mike shook a mutinous head. He was not a patient man.

"Well an' good, sorr—well an' good! The saints help ye, that's all. An' now, since ye have hired ye such a par-r-r-agon, ye'll be needin' me no longer. I'll take me time, sorr—before it's Lily-White Hand that has t' count it up."

"Nonsense, Mike!"

But the old foreman was not to be placated.

"No, sorr! 'Tis Saint Patrick an' the snakes all over again. Me an' Lily-White, we do not live together."

Scowling impatiently, Roberts scribbled something and handed it over.

"You know your own business, no doubt."

"I do, sorr—better ner you. An' when ye find this man out, ye c'n send f'r me, an' I'll come back—though I misdoubt it'll be too late, sorr. The saints help ye!"

He was gone. Roberts turned to me, grinning ruefully.

"Superstitious lot! My best foreman, too. Wonder if Hand would take his job? I only wish I'd had that man's experience, doctor. Wonder why a highly certificated engineer like that should be looking for a timekeeper's job? Must be in mighty hard luck."

"I only hope you don't join him there," said I, and with that dubious comfort left him alone.

CHAPTER IV

GAGE OF BATTLE

SUCH was the coming of Lily-White Hand to Black Valley. For a few days he went about his business in Camp Two, and I saw nothing of him. Then Roberts, as he had threatened, gave him O'Shaughnessy's place, and he bossed a gang of men.

From a distance I saw him once or twice, standing with booted legs widespread, gloved hands idle at his sides. He never raised his voice; he scarcely gestured; but the laborers leaped to obey him, working furiously. Also they gave him a wide berth, passing him, when they must, with averted heads and stealthily making that odd Sicilian sign of the horned hand, the charm against the evil eye.

But he was not long at this. North and south, the grades reached out for each other until they had encroached a full quarter of a mile upon the bosom of the Quag. And the Black Quag preserved a sullen silence, not giving tongue as it had a month before; and the engineers laughed at us, saying, "Where's your demon swamp now?" But our old men muttered together, fearing some evil thing—for that Spring the Quag had not yet fed.

Then the Ontario System reached out a long arm and took one of Warren Roberts' assistants; that engineer who had immediate charge of the southern end-of-track. And Roberts gave the place to Isaac Hand, as was his privilege, and congratulated himself to me that he had so good a man for it.

"He's a wonder, that man Hand," he averred. "Just watch him fill that flat!"

Still in his much-washed khaki—I never saw him in any other dress—Lily-White Hand left the railroad camp and came to board at the Putnam House in the village. Now he was an engineer; he could not mingle with mere workmen. So he established himself in a room, with no more visible baggage than a foot-long roll of khaki cloth would hold, and ate at the long table with Roberts and his aides. Mrs. Putnam cooked for him, and pronounced him quite the gentleman.

"Not a bit of trouble," said she. "Eats what's set before him with his eyes on his plate, and never a word out of him. And pays a week in advance."

And Sally Putnam served him; but her opinion was different.

"He has a devil," she declared, for she was an outspoken young lady and well grounded in the Scriptures. And when her mother pressed for a reason the girl only shook her head, admitting Hand's outward decorum. "But wait and see!" A very unreasonable attitude, no doubt—which I was inclined to share with her.

It was at the Putnam House that I perceived the aptitude of the man's nickname—for already the village and the camps called him "Lily-White," save to his face. I had never seen him ungloved until one day when Molly, my wife, had gone shopping in Buffalo and I must eat at the hotel. I sat at the long table with the engineers; and Isaac Hand came in late, stripping off his gauntlets and stuffing them into a pocket as he came.

He sat down; and I looked at his hands. They were small and supple, with tapering fingers like a woman's, and their nails were meticulously filed, trimmed and polished. Also they were white—snow-white, lily-white—and soft and delicate of texture. They exuded a faint fragrance, as of creams and unguents; and Lily-White Hand regarded them lovingly as he ate. But the sight of them irritated me; it is not normal, not wholesome, that a man should have such hands.

The meal being over, Roberts went back to his office and his assistants dispersed, each upon his own purposes. I found

Verne Bookmiller on the green bench outside the hotel door and dropped down beside him to smoke before my office hour. We sat shoulder to shoulder, silently, as old friends do in the country.

And then to us came Lily-White Hand, silent also, and shadowy-gray and neutral so that we scarcely noticed his coming. He sat at the other end of the bench, and his gloved hands rolled a cigaret so deftly that I wondered at their skill.

Presently Mary Belle Hume came strolling by, arm in arm with June Burlingame, hoping for a glimpse of Roberts, no doubt. These two were greatly in love; they were to be married in the Summer—as soon as the Black Quag should be tamed.

The girl spoke demurely to me and to Verne, whom she had known all her life. Her big blue eyes quested the porch for her lover, and instead rested briefly upon Lily-White Hand.

The fellow straightened, giving her eye for eye in a bold, blank stare. Mary Belle shivered and turned pale; she wrenched her gaze away, as by an effort, and hurried on.

Hand turned to me, there beside him. His thin lips curled back into an avid, ugly smile.

"So-ome pippin! Say, doc—introduce me?"

I looked at him in distaste, seeing again that murky flame behind the ice of his pale eyes. I am an easy-going man, and slow to anger, but temper began to stir in me.

"No!" I answered flatly; and at the continued insolence of his stare my hands began to tingle for his corded throat. I could feel my face flushing, for I am of a full habit.

"No! And look here, my man; in Black Valley our girls are not stared at in that fashion."

Beside me, stout old Verne Bookmiller grunted inarticulate approval of my words. Hand rose slowly, lithely, and looked down at me while his gloved hands opened and closed like claws. He was quite white; a flame danced behind his eyes.

For a moment he stood thus, and my mounting temper prayed that he might resent my rebuke. His eyes ran calculatingly over my bulk and met my own again. Then he relaxed.

I do not think he was afraid; he feared neither man nor devil. It was only that he reckoned up his chances and, not liking them, set down a score against me to be evened at some future date. Now he only shrugged, gave his thinly ringing laugh and turned away.

I spat disgustedly at the memory of that lidless stare.

"Verne," said I, "that person and I are due for a clinch some day."

"Leave him be," counseled Bookmiller wisely. "He'll get his come-uppance—you see!"

CHAPTER V

THE QUAG SPEAKS

BUT I must not waste time upon minor things, such as the relations between us human puppets, while the Black Quag waits. I promised that Mary Belle should be my heroine; and if she is not, I have none. But beauty and laughter and love, and the dreams of innocence, have little place in such a somber tale as mine.

The next day, then, was an easy one for me; strangely, because it rained and the roads were hub-deep rivers of thin mud. And on such days, as every doctor knows, men, women and children take to bed and send out hurry calls for help, and every seasoned invalid runs over his stock of well-worn symptoms and furbishes them up against the doctor's demanded coming.

None the less, that morning I was free, and I savored my ease as only a country doctor can. In the post-office, waiting for the ten-fifteen mail, I came upon Simon Black, who might have signed himself "Simon Black III," if such refinements of family pride had been known in our valley. He was the son of a father in full age; latest born of a man who, in his own infancy, had ridden an ox-wain over Cranberry Hill into a virgin valley; who, still in his mother's arms, had been hardly saved from the Black Quag's maw when the new house of Simon Black the First was swallowed up.

And now, himself well past threescore and ten, Simon the Third still tilled the fat acres which had been his grandfather's and his father's before him. The Black farm ran straight across the Quag; full four hundred acres, on which this man was born, on which he had lived for seventy-three years. No wonder if Simon knew the Black Quag and its ways as well as you the furniture of your own bed-chamber.

I was fond of old Simon Black; a rugged tower of a man, lump-shouldered from the plow, yet not stooped, whose thick beard, black as his name, defied his snow-white hair. We talked together in brief, slow-spoken sentences with long pauses between, discussing the weather, which, to your farmer, is no conversational small change, but his very meat.

We had agreed that this was a phenomenally wet Spring.

"Ain't had sech Spring rains sence '83, 's I remember," declared Simon. "Good f'r grass—I got a piece o' new-seeded 'at's a foot high a'ready. But it's terr'ble hard f'r the Burlingames an' us. W'y, that south eighty acre on ourn—you 'member; had it to corn las' year? We-ell, I 'as gointa put it in to beans, but I ain't touched it yit. I don't dast put a plow to it. Ain't none o' the Quag reel safe this weather —but that there eighty, why I'm 'most scared t' go on to it m'self!"

I frowned, thinking of Warren Roberts' work. I was fond of the boy, and fearful lest the Quag best him after all.

"Simon," said I. He was thirty years my senior; but in our country "Mister" is for strangers only. "Simon. What do you think about this new railroad?"

"Across the Quag, y' mean?" He laughed mirthlessly. "You heered o' the Injuns' sign f'r the Black Quag, ain't yuh? Many 's the time father tol' me, when I 'as a little tad with ten older brothers—all dead now; dead an' gone. Like this.' '

He joined his two gnarled hands before him, flatwise, forefingers touching, palms down; spread them silently apart and brought them back together with a slap. His meaning was obvious.

"But," I protested, "the Quag's been quiet for seven weeks; not a sound out of it. Maybe it's settled for this year."

Simon Black smiled grimly; shining "store teeth" showed in his beard.

"Uh-huh. Ye-ah. Mebbe."

His voice lowered instinctively.

"Ain't be'n fed yit, has she?"

I shivered, and made to speak; but he went on.

"Lissen, doc. I been livin' 'ith her f'r more 'n seventy year, man an' boy. I ain't no engineer"—sneering—"but I know the Quag! An' I tell you she 's jus' waitin'. F'r what? We-ell, I dunno. Mebbe jus' t' let 'em get their railroad done, an' then take it all of a piece. She 's be'n quiet f'r seven weeks an' three days, like you said; but w'en she gits ready, then she'll talk. An' then—" He repeated his "Injun sign." "An' then—where's y'r railroad, huh?"

I was silenced and, I admit, convinced. Simon knew the Quag; none better. Peggy Ransom tucked the last *Rural New Yorker* into a lock-box and opened the call-window; we moved forward for our mail.

Then Simon turned to me once more.

"You ain't so busy today, you said, doc. Wanta step down on to Burlingames' 'ith me an' look at that there railroad? I'm kinda curious t' see how the Quag's takin' it, close to. I'll fetch y' back."

I agreed gladly; I, too, was curious to see how the Quag was taking it. So we went out and climbed into Simon's ancient side-bar buggy, whose curtained top protected us from the level downpour. Simon gathered the lines into one huge, capable hand and——

"Giddap!" said he.

His high-headed, round-barreled team—for none of us would have dreamed of venturing into this mud with one horse—stepped obediently forward, while I admired them anew. Old Simon alone, of all our farmers, clung to Morgan horses—that almost extinct breed. "These here Clydesdales an' sech 're too heavy an' clumsy f'r the Quag," he averred. So he still drove Morgans; beautiful horses, which he bred himself—horses still fit, as were their ancestors in the old days, to road it a hundred miles today and trot a track-mile inside three minutes tomorrow—the only real general-purposes horse ever developed. I rhapsodize, of course; why not? Who should judge horse-flesh if not a country doctor?

Knee-deep in mud, the horses plodded on steadily, easily, saving their strength as Morgans do; and the buggy wallowed after them, its axles scraping the road-bed flat behind us. We drove south along the Creek Road—although it is half a mile from the creek—the N. Y. & O. at our right and the Quag upon our left, skirting that sinister flat for a mile or more. There are no roads upon the Black Quag.

Due east of the village the yellow ribbon of the Cranberry Hill Road climbs straightly up its slope; but to reach it from Black Valley one must drive north two miles, or south almost as far, to Center Street or Canada Street, there cross the valley on firm ground and turn back on the other side. At best, it makes a five-mile detour; yet not the most heedless of our dwellers would suggest road-making upon the Black Quag. That was reserved for these railway engineers.

And so in due course we reached Camp Two, and Simon hitched his team outside the office where the four horses which drew the engineers to their work still stood, harnessed to their long covered wagon.

THE rain had ceased; miraculously the sun appeared, and with its coming the ordered activities about us took on a visibly faster tempo. The little construction engines, drawing long strings of stilted dirt-cars toward the end-of-track, whistled cheerily; snatches of song came from the laborers who plied pinch-bar and maul and track-wrench. Simon Black, rubber-booted as became the season, strode down the muddy track, and I followed him out on to the bosom of the Black Quag.

Six feet high and, to all seeming, solid as granite, the new-made grade ran northward for three hundred yards and more; and beyond it the track strode on precariously, light-trestled on the thin skin of the Quag itself. Half-way we must step aside for the coming of a loaded dirt-train; and when it had rattled by Simon stood quiet a moment, staring down at the Quag beneath him.

I followed his gaze. Before my eyes, quite silently and as if by stealth, a tiny crack opened and spread without a sound. For a yard—a rod—the black earth gaped slightly, and blacker mud oozed bubbling up.

"Humph!" said Simon Black, and strode onward.

We reached the end of the grade just as the dirt-train squealed to a stop upon the trestle beyond and dumped its cars on to the Quag with a thunderous roar. And here, watching, gloved hands idle at his sides, stood Lily-White Hand. He did not notice our coming, but gestured slightly to the trainmen and turned his back, looking across the flats toward Black Valley town.

The little engine panted; with much fuss and banging the light dirt-cars began to roll back toward us. They clanked past Lily-White Hand; and Simon gave a warning shout. The body of one car, still tilted, was swinging back into place; it thrust out a long iron bar, reaching for the engineer.

With one flashing look Hand leaped away from its menace, lost his footing on the soft slope and stumbled down upon the Quag.

Here was no open, honest sink-hole, but what seemed solid ground. Yet, as Lily-White Hand turned to climb the grade once more, I saw that he stood knee-deep in it. He made to raise a foot and could not. Puzzled, he looked down, and tried again, and sank to the mid-thigh. The Black Quag held him fast.

Yet he showed no fear; only irritation.

"Here, you men!" he called to a near-by gang of laborers. "Lend a hand!"

They came unwillingly, muttering to one another; but they came and clambered down the slope. Then Simon Black took charge of things. His heavy shoulders straightened; his head snapped back so that the thick black beard jutted straight out. He raised a voice long used to calling mile-distant cows, and the squat laborers shrank from the blast of it.

"Stop!" he commanded. "You fool guineas—be you tired o' life? Keep off the Quag. Go git ropes—git boards—git fence-rails—anything!"

The men obeyed, unquestioning, though Hand cursed them vilely as he sank lower and lower. They found a bit of wire cable somewhere and brought it, panting. Simon twisted it into a bight.

"Hands up!" he snapped at the mired engineer, now arm-pit deep in the Quag.

Lily-White obeyed. His face was composed, but strangely white against the black, viscid muck that rose about him. Old Simon tossed his stiff loop skilfully, like a practised quoit-player. It dropped over Hand's raised arms, and he lowered them. The cable settled safely about his arm-pits; but lowered arms, and shoulders too, sank suddenly beneath the mud. His chin tilted back as the Black Quag reached up for its victim.

"Quick!" bawled Simon. "Tail on to that rope, an' pull like ——!"

But even so, with all of us tugging as for dear life, Lily-White Hand was lip-deep in the earth before the Black Quag began, sullenly, to yield him to our traction.

We dragged him out, bemired and dripping, until he lay safe on the railroad fill, black, noisome muck from chin to heel.

He lay so, coughing, for a space, and felt of his chest tenderly. Then he rose, white-faced, speechless, and shook himself. Neither Simon Black nor any of us had from him one word of thanks. He looked down to where the black drip of his passing led to a new-born sink-hole that bubbled as if with sluggish, reptilian mirth, then out over the sweep of the Black Quag.

His white face sharpened; I saw that ugly, murky flame leap up behind his pale eyes. He made a futile gesture, as if to clean himself; for he was a man of scrupulous, catlike cleanliness. He stripped off one gauntlet, whose cuff was choked with muck, and examined his hand—not lily-white now, but all besmirched.

And then—then he stretched out his hand, still filthy, and cursed the Black Quag; cursed it by name as a Thing, a being, a personal foe. It was cold swearing, from between clenched teeth; blasphemous, so that we shuddered to hear him, and the Sicilians clutched furtively at *jettaturas* or made the sign of the cross.

"—— you!" he finished. "You black, stinking, small-town mud puddle! Dirty me, will you? I'll bridle you; I'll break you; I'll send ten million tons of freight across your black, lousy back! I'll——"

I think he went on for a moment; at least, I saw his lips move. But we did not hear his voice.

For suddenly the Quag spoke. The voice of something greater than he struck his words from the lips of Lily-White Hand. It was a very dreadful sound, even to us who knew the Quag, for it issued from the very belly of the earth and traveled up through shocked limbs to rattle the very teeth in our heads, to churn our brains with unbearable nausea. Though it thundered in my ear-drums, it did not seem loud; indeed, I wondered stupidly if it were sound at all, or only vibration.

But sound or no, the Black Quag had spoken. It had accepted the challenge of Lily-White Hand, and warned him honestly. Of that, I think, we were all convinced, even the man himself. For he flinched from that warning and wet his lips, his white face very sharp. The murky flame died in his strange eyes, and that ophidian stare changed subtly. For the first time I saw him blink.

Then Simon Black, as had the old Seneca chief so many years ago, flung up his hand in a wordless farewell and turned away, and I followed him. And one by one the laborers followed me, leaving Lily-White Hand alone—a puny, desolate figure upon the Quag's immensity.

CHAPTER VI

TROUBLE IN CAME TWO

SIMON walked fast, with the high, shambling stride of one who has long followed the plow; I was put to it to keep up with him. At the camp the laborers left us, shaking their heads at the eager questioning of their fellows, and sought the bunk-house. But Simon unhitched his trembling team and scrambled into the buggy. While I still hung halfway in, he lashed his horses into a run, which the mud soon slowed to a trot, then a walk. And until we reached the valley's edge he drove with chin on shoulder, speaking no word.

Then he relaxed, expectorating vastly, and snapped horny fingers like a pistol-shot. The horses leaped forward.

"That's y'r railroad," he prophesied. " 'Nd as f'r that there Hand; why, he won't be missed, I expect."

The old man stopped in front of the Putnam House to let me out. Deacon Smith sat there, with Verne Bookmiller. Old Simon drove away in silence, toward his home at the foot of Cranberry Hill; but I sat down on the old green bench beside them and told these two my tale, for I was still shaken.

They heard me through with heavy interest.

"I thought the Quag was talkin' kinda brash," said Verne.

Indeed, as I learned later, the farmers along White Creek, seven miles away, had heard the Black Quag speak and had wondered also.

But Deacon Smith wagged his head ominously.

"That man Hand!" said he, and muttered something in his square, gray beard about "them that go down quick into the pit."

As he spoke, the man Hand stood before

us, still black with ooze. So close he was that the reek of it struck our nostrils; and mingled with it was the smell of raw spirits. On his mired hip was a bulge of familiar outline, and I knew that Lily-White Hand had sought solace from 'Tonio, the camp's bootlegger.

He glared at us palely, his white lips frozen in a mirthless grin.

"I am neither Korah, Dathan nor Abiram, old fool," said he softly. "No; but I am like the unjust judge."

With his thin, ugly laugh he swaggered past us into the hotel, swaying a little on wide-set feet.

The deacon spat reflectively.

" 'He feared not God, neither regarded the man.' " The old gentleman was thoroughly grounded in the Scriptures. "Wey-ell, wey-ell!"

Sally Putnam touched my shoulder; she had come out of the house, unnoticed.

"I told you he had a devil!" she whispered.

And with that the rain began again, and Jack Mack hailed me from across the street, and I must harness my own horses and drive out along the Ridge Road.

It was late enough when I finished my day—after ten o'clock. But I walked down to the Putnam House, none the less, intent on warning young Roberts against Lily-White Hand. Yet what could I say? That he had cursed a swamp for muddying him? Roberts would laugh. At least, he had quit work before noon; and by now he must be thoroughly drunk. That was something.

I found the young engineer in his own room, poring over reports. He had been in Buffalo all day, on the trail of some elusive shipment of rails, but I had no news for him.

"Oh, yes!" he laughed. "Hand told me; he fell into a puddle. Had to come home and clean up. He walked across the flats rather than make the big wagon an extra trip. Mighty decent of him, I call it."

"Why didn't he go back to work?" I had already made sure he hadn't.

But Roberts laughed again.

"The men wouldn't do any more until tomorrow because the swamp made funny noises. Superstitious lot, these old groundhogs."

"The man 's drunk on bootleg whisky."

"Nonsense! Why, I was talking with him two hours ago. He'd had a couple of drinks, of course; so would you, after that experience, wouldn't you, doctor? But he was cold sober. Why, he's gone back to Camp Two tonight, for some office work."

"Or to visit 'Tonio," I grumbled.

Just then some one knocked, and the voice of Phil Riley, Mrs. Putnam's hired man, called—

"Wanted on the phone, Warren!"

We had adopted young Roberts; was he not to marry Mary Belle? Wherefore we no longer "Mistered" him.

The boy rose, yawning.

"Aw-right, Phil! Be back in a minute, doc."

But I followed him down, for it grew late. As he took down the receiver of the hall phone I lingered, without knowing why.

"Hello? . . . Camp Two? What's wrong, Flint?" The phone emitted a shrill, tiny scream. "Trouble . . . Dagos fighting . . . " I caught.

"Get Mr. Hand . . . Not there? . . . What? I don't understand. Oh, never mind. Find him; and I'll be right down." He turned to me.

"Something wrong in Camp Two. A lot of Italian laborers drunk and fighting among themselves. Hand must have started home. I'll go right down."

He took the stairs three at a time, and was back in a breath, buttoning his mackinaw.

"Wait, Warren!" I called. "Have you got a gun?"

He turned back, to show me a flat, stub-nosed automatic, at which I grinned.

"Ever see drunken wops fighting?"

Roberts shook his head.

"Well, I have. Before I settled here I put in two years as contract surgeon for the Structural Steel people. You may be one grand little engineer, my son; but as the big boss you've a lot to learn. Wait a minute."

Riley had disappeared; but he came at my shout.

"Phil," said I, "just lend me that old ten-gage, will you?"

Phil grinned, rasping a stubbly chin.

"W'y, sure, doc. A fine night f'r pa'tridge, ain't it?"

It was pitch-black and raining again.

"Yes," said I grimly. "Got any buckshot?"

"We-ell—why, I guesso. Few shell left over f'om that trip las' Fall, up into Herkimer County——"

His voice trailed away. In two minutes he was back with a business-like double-barreled shotgun, and in the other hand a half-dozen shells.

"Lemme go," he begged, for he scented trouble.

"You bloodthirsty old bruiser! Go sing your old livery plugs to sleep." Phil tended the hotel stables. "I'm going myself."

Roberts looked at me gratefully. Yet——

"I can manage alone all right," he asserted.

I paid no attention.

"Lend me your lantern, Phil. Come along, my son; let's quell the riot."

And so we set out, at a half-run across the still lawns and down upon the Black Quag. Roberts was well in advance, for I grow stout; but I called him back.

"Hold on," said I, puffing. "Let me go ahead; you'd fall into some sink-hole. You don't know the Black Quag."

He laughed.

"Still harping on your silly swamp," he jeered good-naturedly. "All right—lead on!"

So I advanced, lantern in hand, shotgun under my arm, my pockets stuffed with shells. I walked cautiously, testing the ground before me, and made Warren step in my tracks. Even so, we were mired time and again; yet not too deep. Within twenty minutes we had reached the southern end-of-track. It was not more than three-quarters of a mile from town, as the crow flies.

We scrambled up to the grade, thankful for firm ground. But Roberts stopped and swung my lantern about.

"Fill's not high enough by three feet," he grumbled. "Must speak to Hand tomorrow."

I made no comment, but urged him on, for already I began to hear snatches of shrill clamor from the distant bunk-house. We stumbled over the ties, dodged an engine with its fires banked, and behind it skirted a long string of empty cars. Then a short run over empty track, fifty yards of thick mud, and we reached the bunk-house door, dripping and breathless.

FROM within came a yelping outcry, continuous now; the high-pitched vocables of excited Italians, differing strangely from that rough bass muttering which you may have heard, but equally the voice of an angry mob.

Warren was all for plunging in; but I checked him.

"What are you going to do?"

"Stop this nonsense!" He gripped the latch.

"How? If I'm any judge of howls, that bunch smells blood. They won't listen to you—or hear your little popgun if you let it off. Are you ready to kill some of them?"

I held the lantern up to his face. It was uncertain, irresolute. The boy was not quite sure of himself; whereby I knew that he could not control this mob.

"Let me," said I, and pushed him aside.

I broke Phil Riley's shotgun and thrust two shells into its breech, then cocked both hammers and pushed the door back.

Unseen, we entered a dim, smoky interior, choking thick with burning kerosene and tobacco, whisky-fumes and the smell of sweat. Before us crouched forty or fifty swarthy laborers, a forest of waving arms, astonishingly vocal. Their backs were toward us; they faced, across a cleared space, another mob of equal size and equal vehemence. And between these groups two stocky men gyrated, dancing like dervishes. The left hand of each clutched one corner of the same red bandanna handkerchief; their right hands moved swiftly. I saw the flash of knives, heard the clash of steel on steel.

Then, staring over the heads of these squat foreigners, I saw a movement at the shadowy farther end of the bunk-house. The door there opened; a damp gust swirled down the smoky room; and a gray shape, a shadow among shadows, slipped out and disappeared.

At the same instant the intolerable bedlam rose to an even shriller note. The shirt of one duelist had been ripped open; blood dripped from his arm. The pack nearest us yelped like dogs on a hot trail, surging forward. From nowhere a dozen knives appeared among them.

"Stop!" shouted Warren Roberts; and the babel whirled his voice away as the wind takes a dead leaf.

No one turned.

Grinning faintly, I raised Phil Riley's shotgun and aimed it down the bunk-house a foot above those agitated heads.

Wham! The bass roar of black powder, doubly loud in that confined space, punctuated the clamor about us; put a period to it. Just above the farther door a sizable hole gaped in the shack's wall and a little star peeped curiously through, for the rain had ceased.

Still gripping their handkerchief, the knife-fighters stood frozen, staring at us. And the farther pack stared too, and the nearer, still crouched for a rush, gaped at us, chin on shoulder. It was deadly quiet; so quiet that I heard the tiny splashing of the last drops from the eaves outside.

"All knives in a pile, out there on the floor," I ordered. "And quick. *Vite! Vite!* Because next shot will be through, and not over."

They leaped to obey. Not all understood my words, perhaps; but my gesture, and the threat of the shotgun, spoke a universal tongue. And the wind of that first discharge still plucked at their scalps.

I am only a country doctor now; but my youth was turbulent. I have seen men charge pistols and rifles—yes, and machine guns—once. But I have yet to see a man walk in cold blood to the muzzle of a shotgun in the hands of a determined man. And I was that. After all, it is a doctor's mission to save life; and if, to save a dozen from thirsty knife-points, one or two must be shot—as the French say—for the encouragement of the others—why, that was the merest economy.

Wherefore, my laborers, having looked once, moved swiftly; for each man felt buckshot rapping at his midriff. In such circumstances it is only the reluctant man who need kill, none the less. If he be willing enough, he will not have to pull trigger.

Now they all stood submissive before me, cautiously far from a heap of discarded stilettos. I ran my eye over them, picked out a man and gestured him forward with the shotgun-muzzle.

"You! What's-your-name — Salvator Rosa! Front center!"

He came out meekly; a swart, ear-ringed Neapolitan, my laborer of the stomach-ache.

"Now then! Why do you *ladrones* disturb the rest of your betters?"

The man had little English; but it served. With many a gesture, many an apologetic grimace and shrug, he explained. Some bad man had brought in liquor. Who? Ah, *signor!* Ah, *padrone!* How should he know? He was but a poor man, and ignorant. *Altro, Signor Dottore,* they all got drunk. What would you? Then came the Signor Hand, that very great engineer, to say that henceforth only Sicilians should work on the what-you-call es-swamp, because they were bold men, not like Neapolitans, white-livered.

Again the crowd drew apart into two almost equal groups; men hissed maledictions, exchanged black looks.

"Well, go on!" I ordered; though the thing began to be clear enough.

"*Altro, signore*"—now he recognized and included Roberts in his statement. "*Altro.* Then these Sicilian pigs"—a menacing murmur from one group, which I quelled with my shotgun-baton—"these Sicilians became unbearable." He was talking voluble Italian; I followed him with difficulty. "We of Naples reasoned with them courteously, *signore,* reminding them that they are dogs of *condottieri,* as all know. And then stilettos showed, and the Signor Hand advised us, saying that not all should fight, for the work must go on, but that each party—for half of us are Neapolitan, *signore;* good workmen all, and honest, peaceful men—should choose its champion to decide the matter. And our champion, *signore*—behold, the Sicilian dog bleeds. *Altro!*"

"Shut up!" said I, for the two parties snapped at each other once more. "Sicilians and Neapolitans alike, you are all *ladrone*—thieves and beggars, very great loafers who disturb the rest of honest men."

They all grinned delightedly and began to whisper among themselves with much subdued laughter. There is nothing like good-natured and impartial abuse to reconcile disputants.

"And where is the Signor Hand now?" I asked Salvator.

He spread his hands; his shoulders rose to touch his hooped earrings.

"Ah, *signore,* how should I know? He was here; he is gone. I am a poor laborer; should I question the Signor Hand?"

"Humph!" said I, and looked the crowd over once more. "Where's the whisky?"

They showed me a dozen empty bottles. It was all gone; and they, by now, tolerably sobered.

"Pick up your knives," I ordered, "and keep them out of sight. You are not men, but children, who quarrel over nothing. And remember—the Signor Roberts, the big boss"—I had rather forgotten him till now—"he will be close by, and I with him. And if there is any one among you who still desires to fight, we will reason with him—and afterward a dirt-train might be driven through his belly from front to back!"

My Italian, long since disused, was coming back to me; I rather enjoyed laying down the law to them. I was rewarded with eighty flashing smiles.

"*Si! Si! Si, signore!*" they all murmured ingratiatingly; and we left them amicably squabbling over their hardware.

Outside I turned to Roberts.

"What do you think of your man Hand by now?"

The boy frowned dubiously.

"I'll talk to him. Maybe he thought it was best to settle the dispute that way. But you, doc; you're a wonder! You can handle men. Why didn't you study engineering? You ought to have my job."

"Humph!" said I again, being uninterested in my own perfections. I am a safely married man, and my wife keeps me humble. "The first thing I'd do would be to fire Lily-White Hand."

CHAPTER VII

"WHERE'S YOUR RAILROAD?"

WE WALKED over to the office and there found Flint, the watchman. Having reported trouble, he had effaced himself as good watchmen do, and now he sat in his chief's swivel chair, feet on desk, smoking peacefully.

To him Roberts spoke sharply.

"Flint, why didn't you let Mr. Hand settle things in his own way, and not trouble me?"

Flint gawped at him, open-mouthed, too surprized to get up.

"Why—why, Lily-White, he—" His superior's scowl checked him. "Oh! Yes, sir; I s'pose I sh'd of left it up to Mr. Hand." And he winked at me.

There were two cots in the little office building, and I proposed that we spend the night there. It was more than two miles to the village, over well-nigh impassable roads; and frankly I funked the Quag. Moreover, I wished to be close by if Lily-White Hand returned to complete his deviltry; for I knew that this riot had been entirely of his making.

So I called up Molly and told her if a call came in to rout out Phil Riley and send him after me. Then I laid the shotgun ready to my hand, pulled off my boots and went to bed.

I do not know whether or not Roberts rested; my cot was soft enough for one used to taking half his sleep in a lurching buggy. And no alarm disturbed us. The bunk-house slumbered; and, I make no doubt, the watchman too. And as for Lily-White Hand, wherever he was, he made no sound.

Soon after six I woke. Roberts still snored, but there was no sleep left in me; so I pulled on my boots and went out into a clear, rosy dawn. Little birds sang to me, and our land was very peaceful. And presently the great sun's rim peeped over Cranberry Hill to say good morning and I wondered again, as often before, why men should value themselves so highly.

A little while, and the sun would peep over Cranberry Hill once more, and find the Black Quag there as of old; but none of us who lived by it. And when its makers were forgotten, and this new railroad with them, the same sun would look down on the hills and on the Black Quag between them, and, no doubt, on men a thousand years unborn who should then say, as we do now—

"Truly we are the people, and wisdom will die with us."

Flint, the watchman, emerged yawning from some secret lair, and joined me.

"Where's the big boss?"

"Asleep," I told him.

"Huh! Say, doc—he's hipped on this Lily-White Hand, ain't he?"

I said nothing; and presently he went on, aggrieved.

"Whyn't I leave him manage that scrap, huh? W'y doc, he started it! I seen him. He come down here 'ith 'is arms full o' bottles, ugly drunk. I challenged him; but he's got a bad eye, that Hand. And anyways, it wa'n't my put-in. Well, he went into the bunk-house, an' pretty soon all them dagoes was fightin' drunk, an' him eggin' 'em on. He staged that scrap, right outa nothin'. An' he sneaked outa the back door of that shack when you fellers come in the front one—I seen 'im go. I'm agoin' t' git my time, before— My ——, doc!"

He fell to rubbing his eyes, then stared again over my shoulder at the Black Quag. I turned; I had not looked that way, but at the sun. And I, too, cried out at what I saw.

A little mist lay on the flats, and into it I followed the twin lines of gleaming rail, striving to see them aright. For just beyond the camp they seemed to vanish.

"It's just the fog," said I; and with that word a little breeze came up and swept the fog away.

Northward for three miles the flat bosom of the Quag lay naked before us. The new-laid track ran to its edge, and stopped short there. No, it began to slant downward; the rails pitched sharply, bent in mid-length, and then disappeared in the belly of the earth.

And beyond, where a six-foot fill had run north for four hundred yards, the Black Quag lay empty. A streak of pitch-black, liquid mud, full twenty feet wide and bubbling sluggishly, was all that showed where the grade had been. Four hundred yards north it ran, like a grinning mouth; and beyond it were the surveyors' stakes, untouched. But trestle and fill, and permanent way, and the construction engine with its long string of cars that had stood thereon last night—they were not. The Quag had taken them to itself.

I shook my head, for I was fond of the boy; but he must know.

"Call Mr. Roberts at once," I ordered.

There was no need. I heard a choked cry at my elbow, and Warren Roberts stood there, his face, still flushed with sleep, working strangely.

"Gone!" he muttered. "It's gone!"

I put a hand on his shoulder.

"Buck up, Warren! It's to do over, that's all. Dump enough dirt there, and you could fill up the ocean, let alone the Black Quag."

The words rang false in my own ears; but they cheered Roberts. He straightened.

"You're right, doc! Flint, turn out the men. Snap into it, now! Tell 'em to get those dirt-trains loaded. Phone the hotel; have all the engineers hurry down here."

He plunged back into the office. When I followed, he was at the telephone there, ordering more engines, more dump-cars, more rails and ties.

"Send you home in the big wagon when it comes," he threw over a shoulder at me.

I left him alone. If he had underestimated the Black Quag, the boy was showing a good spirit now. Yet I shook my head doubtfully. Lily-White Hand was still here; and I was sorry for it. More trouble would come of him, I felt.

A buckboard, drawn by straining horses, wallowed along Canada Street. By the railroad crossing it stopped, and old Simon Black climbed down and came shambling toward me. His rubber boots squelched in the mud.

He nodded to me, strode to the edge of the Quag and looked down at those bent, vanishing rails. Then he spat; but not on the Quag; and turned back without other comment.

"C'm on, doc," he invited. "I'm goin' t' the factory. I'll take ye home."

So I went with him to the road, and scrambled on to the buckboard and sat on the backless spring seat beside him, in front of the six huge "big-mouth" milk cans which Simon Black would not give up. He was an old man, and set in his ways; and five hundred pounds of milk troubled his huge frame little enough.

"Giddap!" said Simon.

We rode in silence for a mile or more. Then Simon spat.

"Huh!" said he, and his voice held an obscure satisfaction. "Where's y'r railroad now?"

CHAPTER VIII

LILY-WHITE HAND AGAINST THE BLACK QUAG

THE next day was a busy one for me. I tired out two teams, for the wet weather was taking toll of our farmers. And all through my ride I wondered; wondered what tale Lily-White Hand would tell his chief; wondered whether Roberts would accept it—and, if he did, what the Black Quag would do next.

I got home at six, to a cold house. The Ladies' Aid was giving a church supper, and Molly had gone to it. As for me, I do not love scalloped potatoes; no, nor baked beans—may I never see another bean!—so I went to the Putnam House to eat.

Roberts was there, at the head of the long engineers' table, and Lily-White Hand sat on his right. They two were close in talk. What explanation of last night Isaac Hand had given I never knew; but evidently it had sufficed. For he talked, low-voiced, and Roberts listened, and the rest with him.

Hand sketched some plan upon the tablecloth with his knife-edge, marshaling dishes and silverware to illustrate his meaning. I am no engineer; the most of it was Greek to me; but I gathered that he proposed a new method for taming the Quag. He would bring in pile-drivers; build a sort of crib or raft upon close-set piles, and so float the roadbed upon the surface of the swamp.

No doubt it was a brilliant plan. At least, the engineers all thought so, and even those who disliked Lily-White gave him ungrudged praise. But I was not so sanguine; for Isaac Hand had defied the Black Quag.

After supper I went up to Roberts' room for a smoke. The boy was enthusiastic now, and full of Hand's new method for conquering the Quag. He talked volubly, gesturing with his cigaret; for him, long, heavy freights already rumbled across the swamp.

Then Jim Reed, twelve-to-eight operator at the N. Y. & O. tower, knocked and came limping in. He held out a yellow envelope.

"Jus' come in," he explained, " 'nd 's I was comin' off shift, I fetched 'er up m'self."

Roberts opened the telegram, glanced at it, and swore roundly.

"Now what?" he demanded, tossing the sheet to me.

I read it. Roberts, it seemed, was to proceed immediately to the Southern Division of the Ontario, there to examine the terrain and make plans for a projected bridge across the Susquehanna. He would leave an assistant in charge here, to superintend the joining of the ends-of-track, and would return May fifteenth to inspect the finished work.

Warren began to pace the floor.

"My own —— fault," he mourned. "My reports were too rosy, I suppose; but everything was going so well. The boss thinks it's a foreman's job to finish this line; and it'll take all of us, and night work, even with Hand's scheme, to get it done on time. May fifteenth! Four weeks—and I've got to go!"

I might have said, "I told you so!"

All of us had tried to warn him of the Black Quag. But I nobly refrained.

"Telegraph back at once," I advised. "Tell them what you're up against; ask them to leave you here another month."

"And admit I've been a fool? Admit my reports were mistaken? Not by a —— sight!" His was the pride of youth, which must always prefer being wrong to admitting it. "No, I can do better than that."

He opened the door, and shouted down the hall:

"Mr. Hand! Oh, Hand! Come here a minute."

Lily-White Hand came, his green-gray khaki once more spotless, his hands gloved as always. He gave me a pale, ugly stare.

"Yes, chief?" his thin voice mocked; I think he expected dismissal.

He knew well that I had no love for him.

"Hand, I'm leaving at midnight. Got to look over another job. Can you take hold here, and finish this one by May fifteenth? I was going to use your plan anyway. How about it?"

Hand grinned evilly. "Fill in that puddle? Why, chief, I'd love it!"

He was sincere; and it was not promotion, not authority, that he meant, but the opportunity to humiliate his enemy, the Black Quag. That I could see well enough.

"Good! You're in charge from now on. Wire me care of the Southern Division if you need to; but use your own judgment. I want 'em rolling before May fifteenth, that's all. Now, stick around for half an hour; then I'll be back and check up with you while I'm packing."

He snatched up a cap.

"Come on, doc. Walk up the street with me. I must say good-by to Mary Belle."

Our way led past my house; and there I stopped, for a team of Morgans stood by my hitching-block and a huge shape mounted my steps.

"Here's a job for me," said I. "Good-by, Warren. I'll see you next month."

We shook hands.

"Take care of Mary Belle," he begged.

"My son," I answered, "I had been doing that for some years before you appeared upon her youthful horizon. Go worry about your railroad; I'll look out for Mary Belle."

He laughed, and swung off up the street; a jaunty figure enough, and one to fill a woman's eye. A good boy, if headstrong at times; I wished him well.

Then I turned to the tall old man on my porch.

"Well, Simon, what's on your mind? Some of the folks sick?"

He came down to me deliberately.

"We-ell, doc," said he, "my woman ain't feelin' jus' good. Wisht you 'd come lookit 'er. She's always puny, come Spring; 'minds me o' my third, that way."

This was his fifth; and, though she was twenty years younger, I did not doubt that Simon would outlast her.

"All right," I agreed. "But you'll have to fetch me out and back, or wait till I get a livery team. I've tired out four horses today."

"Dreadful bad roadin'," said Simon Black. "Aw right, doc. I'll fetch ye. Ready?"

"Let me get my bag." I hurried into the house, kissed Molly, who was aggrieved as always when I must be out of nights, snatched my medicine-case and went out again.

Simon was already in his buggy; I climbed up beside him, and we lurched off toward the valley.

"Warren goin' som'ers?" inquired my host.

"Called off to another job."

"Ye-ah? An' who's goin' down after their railroad, huh? 'Ve they sent f'r a dipsey diver?"

"Oh, Lily-White Hand's going to finish that, according to some newfangled notion he's got. He's in charge of the whole thing now."

I was thoroughly disgusted, and I expected Simon to be likewise. But he vouchsafed me no word, either white or black. He spat mightily, and said, "Giddap!" That was all.

So we rode in silence down the Creek Road, across Canada Street and back north to the Black house; a big, rambling old place, which was yet dwarfed by the bulk of the cow-barn behind it. That was the pride of old Simon's heart; a monstrous gambrel-roofed barn, almost two hundred feet long, with stanchels in its basement for eighty cows. It has an eighty-foot mow and a sixty-foot bay, which could not contain the whole of Simon Black's hay crop; and from its peak to the ground beneath was seventy feet in the clear.

As always, Simon checked his horses briefly to gaze upon its splendors, blazing red, as all our barns are painted, beneath a new-risen moon. Then he pulled up at the kitchen door, dismounted and kicked away a couple of excited cow-dogs.

I went in and saw the puny woman; for she was all of that—an old chronic cardio-nephritic, for whom I could do little enough. But I gave her some good advice and a few pills, knowing that the former would be neglected and scarcely hoping that the latter would do much good.

Then I hooked my stethoscope into the armhole of my vest, closed my battered tablet-case and went out.

Still mute—he was never a talkative man—Simon Black backed and swung his horses and drove out on to the road. But this time he turned north instead of south. I wondered why he went that way; both Canada Street and Center Street were main-traveled roads, and therefore equally sticky in Spring. But to go north from the Black farm and across Center Street was almost two miles farther.

None the less, that way we went, splashing and wallowing through the mud while I dozed uneasily. The night was chill; there was a touch of frost in the air—nothing unusual for our country in April. And a crescent moon rode high, silvering the mud beneath us with its faint light.

I dozed uneasily, I say; and after some time awoke with a start, missing the lurch of our progress. Old Simon had stopped his team just below the Ontario's Camp One, which bordered the Black Quag on the north.

HE CLIMBED out silently, and stalked south along the new railroad track. I followed, wondering. The grade, at ground-level here, rose slowly into an embankment as the land about it fell away to the Quag. Simon strode on for a quarter of a mile over this northern fill which the Black Quag had so far suffered to remain, and out upon the unburied trestle which was its southernmost end.

I am not normally superstitious—or not more so than most men—but a queer chill oppressed me as I hung back, watching him as Percival watched Sir Galahad striding along the Giant's Causeway. The alep moon shone upon his huge figure, and made of his bared white head a glory more striking for the jet black of his beard beneath.

At the trestle's very end he stopped, and looked far out over the flat, then down to the Black Quag at his feet. And then he stretched out one great arm—though our farmers are sparing of gesture—and stood so, unmoving.

In that moment there was about Simon Black something sacerdotal, like a Druid of old invoking unseen, malignant deities. His gesture called for a hearing; would some Shape rise up to meet it?

But there was nothing; only the clear sky and the crescent moon above, and the Black Quag below, with its encompassing hills, and Simon standing alone, his huge figure dwarfed by the Quag's immensity.

Then from far to his right floated a distant tolling; the clock of the Methodist Church, striking midnight. As if he had waited for that signal, Simon spoke.

His voice was low and confidential, like the voice of one who tells a secret to his familiar friend; and this is what he said—

"Lily-White Hand's bossin' this end, too."

That was all; and after it he held his poise a moment, as if waiting. My heart pounded in my ears, I know not why. The air was still; there was no breeze, nor any sound at all. Simon Black spoke with the Black Quag; and the Quag was hushed to hear his voice.

And then, from right and left, I began to hear tiny, sucking, bubbling noises. I thought—or was it fancy?—that the ground beneath me shifted. Simon Black lowered his arm and turned. He strode past me, unseeing, his bearded face uplifted to the moon. And on it was a look of exaltation.

Back to the road he went, walking fast, and called on me to hurry. Plainly he had no more business here. And we rode home in silence.

CHAPTER IX

THE QUAG ACTS; AND LILY-WHITE HAND REACTS

NEXT morning, going down-town after the mail, I saw the Ontario's whole staff of engineers just emerging from the hotel; all but Hand, who was nowhere in sight. Wondering what this might portend, I hailed Freddy Hoyt, the youngest of them.

"Good morning, infant! Is this a holiday?" For it was after eleven.

"Why, no, doctor. Our new chief called a staff conference. You heard what happened to the north end last night?"

"No," said I; and thought of the message which Simon Black had given to the Quag.

"Well, it's a fishing job." He was just from the oil country, south of us. "Mr. Hand has permanently mislaid a quarter-mile of perfectly good railroad, so he has. It's done gone away and left us."

He chuckled a bit, for he did not love Lily-White.

"It's peeved the big boss. He called us all in this morning, and scolded us something horrid. Cheerful as a rattlesnake, that bird; and his face sharper than a meat-ax. Br-r-r! The dear, kind man! So he laid us down four days' work apiece, to be done before sunset or off comes our heads. Can't stop chattering here, doctor; I got to get ten thousand thirty-foot spiles, if I have to chop down the trees myself, and get 'em here while Wildman's stealing him four pile-drivers. G'by!

"What? Lily-White? Oh, he's gone off somewhere to fast and pray. I didn't see his ouija-board, but I bet he's going to commune with the spirits, just the same."

He came closer.

"Oh, doctor dear, I just love your swamp! 'It's Hand against the Quag,' says our new boss. Ten to one on the Quag, doc!"

"No takers," said I soberly; and he trotted off toward the depot, laughing.

In the post-office the village elders were gathered together, and my first glance told me that they had heard the news. Each aged face wore a look of solemn satisfaction. Their prophecy had been fulfilled; but its very fulfilment awed them a little. Your true countryman is deeply religious, for he lives upon the sufferance of God. To you, perhaps, the rain and sun mean only a closed car or an open one, rubbers or none; but the farmer who gets his bread by them knows Who causes the bud of the tender herb to spring forth. The acts of God are his conditions of life. And so, quite naturally, our people saw in the workings of the Black Quag a sign from Heaven.

Deacon Smith summed the matter up.

"The Lord looketh on the earth, and it trembleth," he declared, "and the wicked shall be shaken out of it."

I knew that he meant Lily-White Hand, whose defiance of the Black Quag was already passing into our legend.

A dozen heads wagged solemn approval of the deacon's quotations, and upon that I left them to go about my own affairs.

My ride that day was comparatively short; I was home by three o'clock. Driving up Main Street, I was stopped. One of the railroad's men asked if I had seen Mr. Hand—for I came straight from Camp Two.

I had not. Neither had any one else, it appeared. Mr. Hand had effaced himself. Did I know where he might be?

"No," said I, and tightened the reins over my tired horses; for the matter interested me little enough. "And Black Valley'll stagger along somehow, even if he never comes back."

At the house I clambered stiffly out of my buggy, leaving Jack Mack to take care of the horses. Mary Belle Hume tripped along the walk toward me, a little basket on her arm.

"Where going, Mary Belle?"

She dropped me a demure curtsey.

" 'I'm going a-Maying, sir, she said!' Want to come along, Monty?"

I straightened a cramped leg tentatively.

"I'm too old and fat, child. I'm just one jump ahead of rheumatism now, without dabbling my feet in any brooklets."

She made a little face, offering me her shoulder.

"Lean on me, grandpa!" The child had no respect for my age and wisdom. "Trot along in then, and toast your aged toes. I'll bring you a nosegay; Watson's sugar-bush is just full of arbutus and Spring beauties."

She danced away, and I went into the house, recalling with a sigh the days when Molly and I had gone a-Maying together. But I found my wife in no sentimental mood. Her black eyes snapped.

"Kirke Montgomery," she began, "I'd just like to know how much longer you're going to doctor folks for nothing. That man Tulliver owes you a hundred dollars now, if it's a cent; and everybody in the three valleys sick, and these awful roads, and you coming in all tired out, and everything—so there!"

I put an arm over her slender shoulders; I know my wife tolerably well.

"Who's sick over there, Molly?"

"It's Grace-Alice-May." All the Tulliver children dragged after them names long as a kite's tail. "John-Albert-Morris was just here, and he said, 'Dad says f'r the doc t' drap ever'thin', an' come a-runnin'! Now, Kirke, if you go!"

"Oh, well," said I. "Just let me change my shoes."

Molly hugged me tight, rubbing her cheek against my shoulder.

"I told John-Albert-Morris you'd be there in half an hour," she whispered.

And at that I laughed aloud, and kissed my wife three times.

Mr. Vincent St. John Tulliver, with his faded wife and his numerous and polyphonic progeny, made up Black Valley's submerged tenth. He never paid money to anybody—least of all a doctor. Wherefore, as every physician will understand, he summoned me often and peremptorily, as by royal right. And I went meekly, and dispensed his family drugs for which I must pay higher every year. And in return, Vincent St. John disparaged my poor attainments to all who would listen, advising in place of my services certain patent medicines by which he set great store—for the diseases of others. That sort of thing goes with a country doctor's job; and Molly knew it as well as I. But her it irritated, while it only amused me.

The Tullivers resided in Crab Hollow, a little cleft in the shoulder of West Hill. It was no more than a quarter of a mile from my door, by way of the meadows and Watson's sugar-bush; so I elected to walk cross-lots and stretch my cramped legs. I put on boots, discarded my overcoat and set forth, black bag in hand.

As I expected, the ailment of Grace-Alice-May was scarcely mortal; but George-Horace-Petronius had a cold, and Sarah-Vere-de-Vere a cough, and the woman seemed kinda pindlin'-like. So I must spend an hour prodding them over and dealing out expensive pills before I could go.

AT LAST I was out, and scrambling up the steep hillside into the maple grove. Mary Belle had had time to fill her basket twice over; if she were still in the sugar-bush, I would walk home with her.

I walked slowly, looking here and there, until, in the very center of the little wood, I caught a flash of pink gingham and turned that way.

Then I heard a scream; the sort of scream that sets one's heart to pounding—for a doctor soon becomes a connoisseur of outcries. I raced toward it, stumbling over an empty bottle, and then another, and into the open space beneath a huge old tree.

Here was Mary Belle, struggling in a man's arms; and, though the fellow's back was toward me, I knew him by gray-green khaki and boots and gloves for Lily-White Hand.

"Be good, now!" he panted. "Yelling won't get you anything—there's nobody to hear."

I caught a glimpse of a sharp profile; of thin, avid lips; and I was upon them.

"Oh, Monty!" sobbed Mary Belle.

I could not speak; wrath closed my throat. But I caught Lily-White Hand from behind, my fingers deep in his lean throat, and plucked him from his victim, back-heeling him as he came.

The man ran backward for a dozen steps and then fell flat; for I am strong. But he writhed catlike to his feet and crouched there, grinning hatefully. His right hand flashed up and back, plucking at something between his shoulder-blades—a gesture that brought back old times to me.

Now, I am not particularly afraid of a man with a knife, having disarmed more than one such in my day. But I wore a brand-new suit, for which I had paid a most sinful price, and I hated to see it cut or bloodied. Also, as I saw from his very stance, this was an ugly knife-fighter; and I did not wish to kill him—quite.

So I resorted to moral suasion. While he yet crouched, knife poised for a spring, I reached into a vest pocket, brought forth a tiny roll of tissue-paper and undid it with exaggerated caution, exposing a surgeon's needle.

"Now, Mr. Hand," said I, and my quiet voice and casual manner restrained him for the moment, as I knew it would. "Now, my friend, I've just come from Cranberry Hill, where they're having black smallpox."

It was quite true; in that section were a number of the "Holiness People," Rollers and Schwenkfeldians, who had dodged vaccination for years because it was against their faith. This Spring a visiting Canadian co-religionist had brought them smallpox to reward their faith; and they had welcomed it so enthusiastically that even then I was meditating a shotgun quarantine. But of course my needle was clean.

"Black smallpox," I repeated. "I used this needle on two cases; it's nicely covered with the virus. Now, dear friend, whenever you're ready, let the hostilities commence."

And I fell on guard like a swordsman, my needle well advanced.

Lily-White Hand maintained his crouch. His evil eyes flared smokily—fire behind ice. If hell should freeze over, I know what a skater would see beneath his feet.

I am sure the man did not fear me, though I fancy that I could have taken him apart with my hands. I think he would have advanced coolly upon knife or gun. But smallpox! That was another thing.

Seeing him hesitate, I grinned openly. The man's raised hand quivered; his thin lips writhed; his face became as the face of a devil with baffled hate and rage. Yet he did not charge. Instead, I saw those lidless eyes hood themselves once more. Lily-White Hand blinked.

Then he sheathed his knife and straightened his face until it was cold and hard again.

"You win—this time," he conceded, his voice quite colorless. "But only this time. This goes down on your score, Montgomery—and I always pay my debts!" He turned to the shrinking, fascinated girl. "And as for you, you——"

At the word he used, I leaped forward. The blood roared in my ears; I saw him through a red mist.

Lily-White Hand looked at me coolly for an instant, then gave his thinly ringing laugh and whirled. He fled through the wood at top speed, and I after him, raging so that for a hundred yards I did not know what weight dragged at my left side.

Then the red mist faded from before me and I stopped, nauseated and shaken by the reaction of my temper. I looked down; Mary Belle hung desperately to my arm, and now I could hear her frightened voice.

"Oh, Monty, no! Oh, Monty, no! Don't kill him—don't kill him!"

I sat down on a stump, holding my head in both hands, panting and weak.

"I'm sorry, Mary Belle," said I, presently. "I—I must have lost my temper."

Mary Belle still clung to my arm. She was sobbing fitfully; but now she choked upon a hysterical giggle.

"I should think you did! Oooh, Monty, you frightened me. Don't be mad any more!" she begged childishly.

CHAPTER X

A WAY OF LIVING

I STROVE to smile at her, and succeeded very indifferently. Then I rose.

"Come, Mary Belle; let's go home."

But she held me back, and looked searchingly into my eyes.

"Now, Monty!" she began severely. "You promised not to be angry any more. What are you going to do?"

"I'm not angry," I denied. "I'm a pacifist; I'm a Quaker! What am I going to do? Why, get Bookmiller and Riley and Ed Burlingame and a few of the boys, and a fence rail and a bucket of tar. We'll give Mr. Isaac Lily-White Hand a triumph. I've got a feather bed I can spare."

I grinned at the thought of it. We are a peaceable, long-suffering folk, but our resentment, once aroused, has been expressed after this fashion more than once; and the parting guest so speeded was unlikely to return.

But Mary Belle would have none of this.

"Why, Monty," she reproved, "I'm surprized at you! You mustn't tell a soul—not even Warren. Don't you see, Monty dear? My beau's gone away, and left Mr. Hand to finish his railroad. I know he's horrid; but Warren says he's just a won-derful engineer; and if the boys tar 'n' feather him, who's going to do his work? Because, you see," she finished gravely, "Warren's railroad has just got to be done on time!"

"Let him come back and do it himself, then," I grumbled.

"Now, Monty! You know he's got another awful important job down there in Pennsylvania. He's depending on Mr. Hand to get this railroad done by May fifteenth, so's he can get everything cleaned up and take his vacation in June. Now, Doctor Kirke Montgomery, if you do anything to this Mr. Hand, and hurt my beau's reputation because his work isn't done on time, and spoil our honeymoon, I'll never, never speak to you again. So there! Oh, Monty, please!"

I swore under my breath. There was reason in the girl's stand; but it went against the grain that Lily-White Hand should go scot free.

"He'd been drinking, Monty. If he was sober, he'd never have touched me. And anyway, you were here."

"Oh, well!" I capitulated, for she was very sweet in her anxiety for the work of "her beau." "But you know very well that Warren wouldn't stand for it."

"Even best beaus shouldn't be told too much," said Mary Belle seriously; and that bit of eminently feminine wisdom made me laugh, so that my rancor cooled.

"Oh, well," I repeated. "Have it your own way, child. But one thing I will do; I'll serve notice on Lily-White Hand! No, Mary Belle, I won't touch him; but the whole of Black Valley town is going to be posted with no-trespass signs for Lily-White. Come along, now!"

She yielded in her turn, seeing that I was not to be moved; and we walked back to the village. At my house she must stop and see Molly; but before we went in I made her promise never to venture alone into woods or meadows while Lily-White Hand remained in Black Valley.

Then I left her and went down-town to hunt up Verne Bookmiller; for, if I spoke with the man Hand myself, I feared for my promise to Mary Belle.

I found Verne in the hardware store, buying chicken-wire.

" 'Lo, doc," said he. "Gotta build me a new hen-park."

I beckoned him into the little back room full of nail-kegs, redolent of kerosene from the great drum in one corner.

"Listen, Verne; I want you to take a message for me—to Lily-White Hand."

He spat reflectively, and tugged at his square gray beard.

"Didn't know you had any truck 'ith him, doc."

"Humph!" said I. "You tell him I said to keep away from Mary Belle Hume."

Old Verne stiffened.

"Mary Belle!" he repeated, and his high, nasal drawl had dropped half an octave. "What's he bin doin' t' her?"

Mary Belle, the only child of a widow, had always been the whole town's baby. I myself could remember, when I first settled in Black Valley, her grave daily calls upon a score of "uncles," of whom I was one; and how her little fat legs would twinkle as she trotted into store after store from which she never emerged without an apple or a stick of candy. No, in Black Valley Mary Belle would never lack for champions.

"Never you mind, Verne. I promised Mary Belle. Don't you lip in. Just go and find Hand, and tell him from me to keep his eyes front. Tell him his job is down on the Quag. He can come to the hotel for his meals; but if he so much as turns his head towards Mrs. Hume's house I'll make a colander of him! Tell him that; tell him I can shoot him down on Main Street at high noon, and any jury in the three valleys 'll acquit me and give me a vote of thanks."

"Uh-huh. Ye-ah. I'll do all o' that, doc—an' mebbe add a word 'r two f'r m'self an' the rest o' the boys."

"You keep this quiet, Verne!" I warned him. "And, wait! Don't say anything about shooting. Tell him this, instead." I stopped to grin, recalling my afternoon's ruse. "Tell him I've plenty of smallpox virus left, and that I've sent away for some cultures of bubonic plague—Black Death. Eyes on the Black Quag, tell him—or I'll pour 'em both into his soup some night!"

CHAPTER XI

THE BLACK QUAG LEARNS TO BEAR WEIGHT

WHETHER it was my warning, or whether, being sobered, the man's purposes changed, from that time on Lily-White Hand regarded his work and naught else. He did more than keep the bounds I had set; after a day or two he moved from the Putnam House and established himself in the office shack at Camp Two, sleeping on one of the cots there.

He drove his men remorselessly, so that they feared and hated him; but he drove himself as hard. He brought in pile-drivers, and they clanked and puffed and thudded night and day, creeping out along the Quag upon the causeway they built. And when the Quag, one night, swallowed up two of the clumsy machines, along with their finished work, he only grinned, Hoyt told me, and sent for more.

And those new pile-drivers he mounted on scows, and floated them upon the bosom of the Quag itself, on the long lane of black, liquid mud which marked the grave of the former road-bed. And when the driven piles sank overnight and were lost, he ordered them spiked together with timbers, and built long cribs and bolted them end to end into a huge raft, thirty feet wide, as in my youth men laid corduroy roads across the swales.

And so the days raced by, and a generous sun dried up the mud until I might turn out my horses and take to driving a car once more. And the newest railroad embankments crept closer and closer as April melted into May; and the Black Quag preserved a sullen silence, so that I began to wonder if it were tamed at last.

On the twelfth of May the ends-of-track were joined, and the last rails spiked and their fish-plates bolted together. And that same night almost half a mile of finished road-bed at the southern end of the Quag settled until the rails were flush with the ground and black ooze covered their ties.

But Lily-White Hand was undaunted. He laughed thinly, they said, and spat into the morass, twitting the Black Quag for an almost-conquered foe.

"Is that the best you can do, Puddle?" he asked.

Then he closed Camp One, at the north of the Black Quag, and shifted all its workmen to Camp Two. In a day he had temporary spurs thrown out to tap the N. Y. & O. north and south of the Quag; and all day and all night long dirt-trains rumbled up from the south, dumped their loads upon the half-submerged grade and moved on to be shuttled around the flats and leave the way clear for other trains.

During all this time Lily-White Hand lived with his work, and I saw him not at all. But on the fifteenth of May, when I went down to the depot for the ten-fifteen, I found Hand there also, his colorless face impassive above gray-green khaki, his hands gloved as always. He did not glance toward Mary Belle, who was with me; but he greeted Warren Roberts before either of us.

"There's your railroad," said he quietly, and gestured with a gloved thumb over his shoulder toward the Black Quag.

"Good boy, Hand! Excuse me a minute."

Roberts clapped his shoulder and hurried past him toward Mary Belle, both hands outstretched.

Lily-White Hand shrugged indifferently, smiled his pale smile, and strolled away with his gloved hands idle at his sides.

And so Warren Roberts greeted his lady-love, and gave me a pleasant word or two, and was off to inspect the completed work; for that night Stuart MacKenzie, the Ontario System's first vice-president and head of construction and maintenance of way, would come to Black Valley in his private car, for which a siding was already cleared. And tomorrow he would make his official inspection of the new division; and when he had pronounced it good the camps would be closed and all the construction forces would have their final pay-day, and bonuses would be distributed.

Mary Belle Hume sighed plaintively at this desertion; but the eyes with which she followed her lover were moist with pride.

"There, Monty!" she whispered. "Isn't this better than as if you'd stirred up all that trouble?"

I admitted it, and took her home, and went about my own affairs.

Late that afternoon I passed the Putnam House, and Roberts hailed me. He stood on the steps, clutching a sheaf of telegrams; and his face shone.

"Oh, doc! Monty, old man! Mr. MacKenzie's car'll be up about six tonight. He's wired on, asking me to dine with him and bring two guests. Will you come?"

"Humph!" said I. "What have I to do with your railroad?"

But Warren would have it that I had helped him more than all his aides together; I don't know why.

"Humph!" said I again. "How about Lily-White?"

"Why, he's my other guest, of course!"

"I can't come," I told him. I had no wish to share anything—not even praise—with Lily-White Hand. "I've been using my dress clothes to clean the furnace in."

One has so few uses for evening dress in Black Valley. Then, seeing the boy's crestfallen look, I melted. Also, the memory of Michael O'Shaughnessy's flitting urged me on; I wondered what might be the outcome of Lily-White Hand's meeting with this other veteran railroader.

"All right, son," I decided. "I'll be there."

The boy smiled his pleasure, and put a hand on my shoulder.

"That's a good chap! I need your hard head back of me. I'm just the least bit afraid of the Big Boss."

And on that I went home to tell Molly, who began to flutter about excitedly, and set Jack Mack to blacking my best shoes, and ordered Sarah Kilrain to put the flat-irons on, for my dress clothes must be sponged and pressed.

"And you, Kirke—run right down to Eddy's and get shaved and have your mustache trimmed; and whatever you do, don't let him smell you all up with bay rum."

"Fiddlesticks!" said I, to tease her. "I shaved last night. I'll go as I am; Black Valley doesn't mind a twenty-four-hour beard."

She stamped a little foot.

"Oh, Black Valley! You make me mad, Kirke. As if you didn't know what an honor this is!"

I have no doubt that she saw me already surgeon-in-chief to the whole Ontario System.

"Well, Molly dear," said I mildly, "Black Valley buys our meat—when we have it." Two years after the armistice my wife was still obsessed by the ideal of meatless days. "And this man MacKenzie only runs a railroad; but here in Black Valley I am high-priest of both ends of life. I think mine is the more important work."

None the less, I went down to the barber shop; for, though I reason and protest, at the last Molly always has her way with me.

And so, when I started out at half-past six, I was prettied almost beyond my endurance; for I love comfort. My evening clothes, relics of a more agile youth, were unpleasantly tight about waist and armholes; my boiled shirt irked a chest more used to flannels, and my collar was a garrote upon my neck.

But Molly was pleased.

"You look lovely!" she whispered, and kissed me twice with wet eyes; and when I had started ran out after me, waving a clean silk handkerchief, and kissed me again.

And, since she was pleased, I made no protest, but stalked off, chin high against the scrape of my collar edge, stoically striving to take short breaths, lest I burst my magnificence somewhere.

CHAPTER XII

A DISMISSAL

I MET Warren at the Putnam House, and together we waited there for Lily-White Hand. But the man was not to be found; and after fifteen minutes or so, Warren grew impatient.

"Can't think what's keeping him," he grumbled. "Anyway, we mustn't keep Mr. MacKenzie waiting like this. Come on, doc; he'll be along presently, I guess."

So we set forth, leaving word with Phil Riley that Hand was to be sent after us as soon as he came in.

Stuart MacKenzie proved to be a tall, saturnine man, hard-faced, with a Scot's burr still upon his tongue. His wife was with him, and two or three other guests; I found them a pleasant party enough, though Roberts seemed a thought more deferential than I would have had him. He looked quite shocked when I contradicted Mr. MacKenzie upon a point of metaphysics. We were discussing the fourth dimension, which Molly declares is "just foolishness." But I do not think our host was displeased—not that I cared. I am not easily overawed, even by the great.

And then, just as we had given him up, the porter brought in Lily-White Hand. He had not changed; he still wore his much-washed gray-green khaki, and he was booted and gloved as always. He stood in the doorway, grinning impudently; his pale, unblinking stare challenged. No doubt he knew what to expect.

For Stuart MacKenzie rose slowly in his place, hard black eyes fixed upon this latest guest, and his face set like a flint.

"Mister-r R-r-rober-rts!" he began, and his r's ripped like a circular saw; "is this the man Hand of your-r r-repor-rts?"

Warren was taken back.

"Why—why, yes, sir," he answered. "This is Mr. Hand; and the road wouldn't have been done on time without him. I—I thought of recommending him for a permanent place on your staff, sir."

The Ontario's vice-president emitted an indescribable sound, waving the suggestion away; but his eyes were still for Hand. He saw no one else, I think.

"Hand!" said he. "Lily-White Hand!"

He stopped, and ground his teeth.

"If I had known! Man, who brought ye out of Persia uncrucified? Ye canna worrk f'r me, Lily-White Hand—and I am minded to tear up y'r grade and have it done again. Now go! Y'r pay will be sent ye at once; see to it, Roberts! An' I warrn ye off the Ontario's right of way. Ye arre dismissed."

"Like a house-maid, without a character," answered Hand, his voice controlled and colorless; but Lucifer cast out of heaven must have worn such a face as his. "Right, chief!"

He made a burlesque salute and vanished, unabashed and insolent to the last.

"There," said our host, "goes a worrse than Judas Iscariot!"

From which I gathered that he had had some acquaintance with Lily-White Hand.

Naturally the incident rather put a damper upon our festivities; and I was not sorry when the porter brought in Jack Mack to tell me that I was wanted over in White Creek, the other side of Cranberry Hill. I made my excuses, and departed in mid-meal; and Warren Roberts looked after me enviously. I was sorry for the boy. His pride of achievement had soured; although MacKenzie had given him no word of blame.

Jack Mack had my car waiting; but I drove home first to discard my grandeur.

"Never again!" I promised Molly, and ripped my collar thankfully from a chafed neck. "What have I to do with the rich and great? Where's my gray flannel shirt?"

"Oh, Kirke!" she chided, but brought it none the less; and presently I climbed into the car and drove away, slouchily comfortable as a man could ask to be, and vowing to eschew frivolities from now on.

The roads were tolerable, and I drove fast across Center Street, past the deserted and half-dismantled Camp One, across the new railroad grade and on toward the hill. And, as I breasted the last rise of Cranberry Hill, I heard the distant whistling of the engine which was bringing the Ontario's pay-car up from the south. What with final pay and bonuses, it must carry twenty thousand dollars, I reflected; perhaps more.

My work on White Creek kept me late. It must have been two o'clock when my faithful flivver slid squealing down the slope of Cranberry Hill. I looked down upon the Black Quag, bisected now by twin lines of rail that gleamed bright beneath the moon, and wondered at that sight. Discredited and dismissed, Lily-White Hand had yet left us a conqueror; for he had bridged the Quag.

Or had he? Dirt the Quag had taken in plenty, and piles and rails and machinery—pile-drivers, cars and engines, but no living thing. The Black Quag had not yet been fed; would it, still hungry, submit itself so tamely to the yoke of these railroaders?

So pondering, I turned west into Center Street and began to cross the valley. And then, from far to the northward, I began to hear the rumble of an approaching train. I thought little of that; long trains had rattled and roared up and down the valley twenty-four hours a day for so long. I forgot that the work was finished now.

As I approached the crossing, the headlight of an engine flared athwart my path so close that I must stop lest I be run over. I saw that it was a "wild engine" as railroaders say; and as it neared I heard the hiss of air, the shrill scream of its brakes.

Then it slid to a stop just beyond me, its drivers locked; and three men dropped from its cab and ran toward me, shouting.

Somebody hurt, I thought, and waited their coming. They crowded up to my little car, and one thrust a pistol into my face.

"What's the idea?" I inquired.

But for all answer, I was hustled out and held at the pistol's point. The men were well masked with handkerchiefs; only their eyes showed, and their figures were unfamiliar to me.

And then, strolling idly toward me from the engine, I saw a shape I knew; a gray-green, neutral figure, booted and gloved, whose face was dead white beneath the moon.

It was Lily-White Hand. He smiled at me evilly. Unlike his accomplices, Hand wore no mask; but I made no doubt that he was the moving spirit of whatever deviltry was toward.

I looked him between the eyes, meditating resistance. But my work was done; they could rob me only of my rest. And every one did that. If some sick baby, back in the hills, had wailed fretfully for my coming, this tale might have ended differently; as it was, I submitted meekly enough.

That did not please Lily-White Hand. In his low, colorless voice, he cursed me vilely.

"I didn't hope for this," said he. "All I wanted was an auto for our getaway—and I caught *you!* Tonight I'll pay you out—cringe, you swine!"

A man held me securely on either side; a third held his pistol at the ready; and Lily-White clinched his gloved hand to strike. I looked at him steadily.

"I wouldn't do that," I advised quite softly.

He stared a moment; almost in admiration, as I thought; and dropped his arm.

"Wait!" he promised. "I'll attend to you later."

And he gave his thin ugly laugh.

Then he turned to his masked confederates.

"Tie him up, boys," he ordered. "Good and tight, now! You stay with him, Jerry, and watch the car; you two come with me."

CHAPTER XIII

THE VENGEANCE OF THE BLACK QUAG

LILY-WHITE HAND strode off toward the waiting engine, and two of his aides followed him.

Bound hand and foot, I lay comfortably enough on sloping ground at the very border of the flat, my feet almost touching the Quag itself; for here at the railway crossing the road skirted close to the swamp. No longer able to act in this scene, I was yet very advantageously placed for seeing.

Straight south across the Quag the rails ran almost level with my eyes; following them beneath the moon, I traced them down the full length of the Black Quag and on to the distant yellow lights of Camp Two. Far to the right, the roofs of Black Valley town were silver in the moonlight, and below them I could make out dimly the bulk of MacKenzie's private car and, a quarter-mile farther south, the pay-car still fast to its engine.

The three men climbed into the wild engine's cab. Hand jerked open its throttle so that the exhaust snorted, then roared, and the drive-wheels span madly. Then they were off. A new-painted sign right by my head warned engineers not to exceed five miles an hour while on the Quag; but Lily-White, who had had it placed there, ignored that warning. He drove furiously forty, fifty miles an hour, perhaps, so that in a moment his engine was a tiny thing, far off upon the Black Quag.

Since I could not choose, I let it go, and turned to my guard for enlightenment. Jerry, however, was amiably uncommunicative. He ignored my questions; but he loosened the cords at wrists and ankles for my greater comfort, and offered me a chew of tobacco. When I declined with thanks, he found a cigar in my pocket, stuck it between my teeth and lighted it. He was not at all a bad sort of robber, that man Jerry. He assured me that he would fix my bonds so that I might work loose within an hour after they had gone.

"With the pay-roll," he added.

And presently we were discussing, amicably enough, the ailments of Jerry's six-year-old son—name and residence unknown. He had adenoids, it appeared; would I think he sh'd have 'em right out, 'r wait till he got his bigness a little more? I advised him to "have 'em right out."

All this time, however, my eyes had searched the distance; my ears had strained for the outbreak of an alarm. But all was quiet about Black Valley; no lights stirred; no clamor arose. Instead, the crescendo panting of Lily-White Hand's stolen engine came to my ears. Its headlight glared at us, rapidly approaching. It was like Hand's impudence, I thought, to leave that headlight undimmed.

The engine roared up at speed, and slid to a stop beside me. The two masked men tumbled down from it, and Hand after them, grinning hatefully. Jerry advanced; the four stood together, whispering.

Then Lily-White Hand spoke, neither softer nor louder than his usual tones.

"Yes, it's all there in the cab. About twenty-two thousand, I imagine; haven't counted yet. Bring it down."

One of them did so.

"Come on," he urged. "Climb into the flivver an' let's highball outa here."

Lily-White Hand took one step, then halted.

"No, by ——!" he swore. "I'm going back."

They stared at him, aghast.

"Don't be a fool," begged Jerry; and, "Don't be a —— fool," cried another. "You sapped that watchman; if he croaks, it's a swinging job f'r us all. Come on outa this!"

But Hand turned back toward the engine.

"You can all wait here, if you're scared," he flung over a shoulder. "Keep the money if you like; —— the money! I took it—I'm square now with 'Stew' MacKenzie and his dirty railroad, and I've got his dog Montgomery to take along with me and pay off at my leisure. Now I'm going back after the girl. She's a pretty little trick, Mary Belle Hume—isn't she, Dr. Kirke Montgomery?"

I fought grimly against my cords; but the others, protesting, laid forcible hands upon Lily-White.

He struck them off. His eyes flamed palely; his face was convulsed, so that I remembered old tales of demoniacal possession.

"I've bested this —— swamp," he raved, and shook a gloved fist at the Black Quag. "I've paid off MacKenzie, and this doctor is mine to do with as I like. But that girl I will have too, in spite of God, man or devil! Isaac Hand always pays his debts!'

He buffeted the others aside, leaped into the cab of the waiting engine and jerked its throttle so that the wheels spun, screaming, and it did not move ahead.

And then, from far down in the earth beneath us, rose a sullen, awful voice. So deep it was that the ground rocked under me, and Jerry staggered; so loud that it drowned and blotted out the thundering of that racing engine.

Awed, Jerry and his mates stared mutely at one another for a breath. Then with one accord they ran for my car, stopping only to snatch at the bundles of currency. Jerry cranked desperately, while the others piled in; and in one moment they were gone, swaying and lurching westward at a pace which made my poor flivver howl protest.

But Lily-White Hand—if, indeed, in his rage he heard it—paid no heed to the Black Quag's final warning. That mighty voice died away, and once more I could hear the stuttering roar of the engine's exhaust. Like some living thing, it gathered its limbs together and leaped ahead in a cloud of steam, and plunged out upon the Quag.

After that, events moved so swiftly that I can scarcely give them in sequence, though I watched calmly enough. Strangely, from the moment that the Black Quag gave tongue I was absolved of all my fears for Mary Belle, and all anger against Hand went from me. The Black Quag had spoken; the Black Quag had taken over the destinies of Lily-White Hand; and I was content to have it so, and to leave him to the Quag.

The locomotive had scarcely begun to move when my eyes were drawn from it. From between my very feet came a sluggish, bubbling noise, and I looked down.

A little hillock, like an ant-hill, had appeared upon the surface of the Quag; a mud volcano, from which black ooze was vomited. Beyond this a fissure appeared in the black earth—a tiny, yard-long crack which spread and widened beneath my eyes, and raced out toward the engine which fled from me at forty miles an hour; aye, and passed it, joining with a hundred other radiating fissures which poured forth black mud silently.

Hand's engine had gone no more than

three hundred yards. And now it began to lurch, and to rock up and down like a flivver on a corduroy road. I heard a sharp *ping-g-g!* and a bolthead whistled past my ear. Ten yards away a rail-end leaped up from the track like the head of a striking snake. A hundred-and-twenty-pound rail it was; and it curled up easily as a boy might bend a bit of barrel-hoop.

The engine raced on, over a sagging, billowing road-bed that seemed to heave beneath it like a troubled sea. It was a quarter of a mile away—no more. Then suddenly it lurched to the left, then the right, and leaped the rail and plunged slantwise out upon the bosom of the Quag, burying its nose deep.

And there it stopped in a vast cloud of steam, screaming like some stricken behemoth, and settled slowly upon its side.

The moon shone placidly; in the far distance the peaceful lights of Black Valley town did not flicker. And the air was breathless-still, and the Black Quag was hushed—and waiting. A wondrous strange spectacle, this, thought I, to be staged for no more audience than my humble self; and fell to wondering, as men will at such a time, how many even stranger old Nature had devised for no man's eyes at all.

That sinister cloud of steam thinned and melted away. The moon shone bright upon the overturned engine, and upon a tiny figure, gray-green and shadowy, which struggled half-way through its upper cab-window and strove to climb out of it, but could not.

Helpless, nor desiring to intervene, I lay there watching. And I saw that long track settling slowly, and twin rivers of black muck form beside it and rise by inches to join each other. Farther on, the wrecked locomotive lay quiescent; and only from minute to minute, marking one rod and then another upon its flank, could I see how it sank and sank into the maw of the Black Quag.

Lily-White Hand, implacably held, writhed and struggled uselessly; his tiny figure was never still. And at times I caught the gleam of his white face, upturned to the unheeding moon; and he tossed his arms, but made no outcry. He was a brave man, if a bad one.

And so, by littles, through the long-drawn hours of that silent night, the new-laid road-bed sank from view. And with it, but still slower, sank that derailed engine, nose first, and oh, so slowly! It was a dreadful thing to see; not sudden, like the lightning-flash which is God's anger, but inhumanly deliberate, callous, malign. What Lily-White Hand's past had been I do not know; but though his soul were black as the cold, thick blood of the Quag, he paid his score in full during those age-long hours.

The night dragged on interminably, and my blood thickened and slowed in my veins, though it was warm. But at last the moon dropped down behind West Hill, and the rose tints of coming dawn painted the eastern sky. And then, as if fearing that it might be robbed of its prey after all, the Black Quag, which had been deadly silent since that first outcry, gulped hungrily for its victim.

Suddenly the air was full of tiny, bubbling, sucking noises; the thick muck lip-lapped at the track, and took it suddenly. And even while I stared at it, blinking, the Black Quag leaped up, as it seemed, and engulfed the locomotive, all but a bit of its cab.

And from that bit, which lessened momently, the gray-green figure of Lily-White Hand still writhed and struggled—yes, and at the very last fought free! As the engine-cab sank and disappeared forever, he leaped from it, and stood for an instant erect, victorious, and shook a gloved fist in defiance of his enemy.

One step forward he took—and the Black Quag had him, shoulder-deep. He had been a man; now he was but a tiny, bone-white dot upon the slimed, fissured surface of the Quag. And the red sun's rim peeped over Cranberry Hill and shone upon that dot in mild surprize.

A thin, far cry, drifted faintly to my ears; uncanny, shrill, despairing, muted by distance to the tiny squeak of a trapped mouse. And even as I heard that scream, and shuddered at it, Lily-White Hand was gone. I blinked, and strained my head upward; but my eyes beheld him not. The Black Quag spread empty before me, untamed of man as on the day of its creation.

I am hardened to the sight of dying folk. Death is my old, familiar foe, whom I have held at grips through many a day and night. But the passing of Lily-White Hand shook me. I did not love to lie there helpless and watch his interment.

Behind me, on Center Street, came the *clip-clop* of horse's feet, the rattle and clink of an early milk-wagon, and a cheery voice that called—

"G'lang thar, Bill!"

I lifted my head and shouted mightily.

CHAPTER XIV

AN EPILOG

IT WAS Ed Burlingame, always an early milker, on his way to the cheese factory. With many a hearty objurgation he untied me, listening to the story which I gave him in snatches, between rubbings of my cramped limbs.

At last I could walk alone, and I clambered up on to his milk-wagon and rode with him toward Black Valley town. And fair in the road before us lay a parcel, and then another, and another—neat packages of currency. Before we turned off Center Street we had picked up five thousand dollars, jolted out of my flivver while Jerry and his mates had fled in panic before the wrath of the Black Quag.

We pulled up in front of the Putnam House, and I shouted to Phil Riley to call Roberts and then run down to the side-track after Mr. MacKenzie. I had news for them.

"Ain't no news, doc," said Phil. "Warren 's out som'ers, an' the other feller with 'im. They found out the pay-car was robbed."

"The pay-car?" That seemed a matter of no importance now. "Here's the money." And I shook a package of bills in his face. "Go get 'em both, Phil—hurry! It's more than a few dollars I'm talking about. Did they kill the watchman?" For I had just recalled the words of one masked robber.

"Naw," said Phil. "He's aw right. Head busted open, thassall. An' here comes Warren now."

Head down, the boy was walking slowly toward us, and I beckoned him to hurry. He looked up at me, and his face was drawn and haggard.

"What now?" he asked dully.

"I've got your money, Warren!" His face brightened. "But—but, Warren, boy—have you looked out on the Quag?"

"No," he answered, wondering. "Why should I? The job's all done. I was worrying about the pay-roll."

"Your railroad's gone," I told him bluntly. "Swallowed up, and Lily-White Hand with it."

Half a dozen farmers, early with their milk, had gathered around to listen. The hugest of them turned sharply at my words and clambered into his buckboard.

"Where ye goin', Simon?" called some one.

Simon Black spat deliberately over a wheel.

"Goin'?" he repeated. "W'y, down on to that south eighty on ourn. Ain't got time t' set gammin' here— 's terrible late f'r plowin' now. Giddap!"

The Black Quag had been fed, at last; and old Simon, wise in its ways, no longer feared to venture out upon its thin skin with team and plow.

But Warren Roberts upturned to me a stricken face.

"Wh-what — w-why?" he stammered numbly.

And then Phil Riley returned, bringing MacKenzie with him, and, still sitting in Burlingame's milk-wagon with five thousand dollars in my lap, I told them my tale.

They heard me out. And when I was quite done, and shivering a little in the memory of Lily-White Hand's blotting-out, Stuart MacKenzie shifted his feet and spoke.

"Good!" said he. "Now we can build an honest r-railroad!"

And that was the epitaph of Isaac Hand.

* * *

I HAVE no more to tell. My little car, quite ruined, was found next day at Dansville, over in the next county; but the Ontario Railroad bought me a better in place of it. As for Jerry and his unnamed comrades, they had vanished, and the rest of the money with them. We never heard of them again; and I have wondered more than once if Jerry had his boy's tonsils to be "took right out."

The private car stayed on our siding for three days. Stuart MacKenzie went afield with his men, who bore transits and set them up, and waved their arms cryptically, directing the placement of new rows of stakes.

And within a month the freight cut-off of the Ontario System was completed, and huge "hump-backed" locomotives roared slowly past Black Valley, tugging and pushing at hundred-car strings of freight. But they passed us far to the eastward; for in the ruler-straight tracks of the Ontario from Coal City to Buffalo there is one great half-moon curve. The railroad sweeps to the east to skirt the Black Quag, and its great trains run along the foot of Cranberry Hill where the grade can be safely ballasted upon bedrock.

Before July first all was done, and the long trains were running, and Mary Belle and Warren Roberts safely married and off upon their honeymoon only two weeks late.

But the Black Quag is still untamed of man. The path of the Ontario across it is gone, and the black mud-river which swallowed it up has dried again, so that men drive mower and reaper across it without a jar. The beans on Simon Black's south eighty are flourishing, and Simon strides down the long rows behind his cultivator without fear of the depths beneath.

Only, a mile due north of Sim's Hole there is a new slough; a vast, sinister pit-mouth, level-full of liquid mud which still bubbles sluggishly at times. We call it "Lily-White's Sink-Hole;" but the name is already being shortened to "White Hole." No doubt the next generation will call it that, and the next, until even the old men shall have forgotten that this is the grave of Lily-White Hand.

FANGAREE

by Thomas S. Miller

GRUESOME, grotesque and often absurd are the "charms" of the Oil Rivers, the streams into which the Niger splits at its delta and whose traffic in palm oil has given them their name. Absurd though the charms may be, the West African is horribly convinced of their potency. Of these charms none is more dreaded than the Fangaree by the Ivory Coast blacks.

The charm stuff is made of powdered human bones, herbs, charcoal, hen dung and certain kinds of earth. This mixture, contained in a snakeskin or plantain leaf or shell, is placed on a bamboo trestle by a jungle path, along which the victim to be charmed is wont to walk.

The charmer may have had a quarrel with the man—a trade dispute or fancied wrong or trouble over that most prolific cause of quarrel between men, savage or civilized, a woman. So he resorts to the atrocious Fangaree for revenge.

His charm stuff on a trestle hidden by the trail in the jungle, he secures to it a live lizard or beetle or ant-eater—anything of the animal world. Then he waits patiently for his enemy to come along, or perhaps gets a friend to entice him that way to gather rubber.

The victim is allowed to pass the trestle, then the charmer breaks a twig, which causes the victim, if he is not on his guard, to turn and look in that direction—to look, that is, at the charm. The charmer immediately hits the lizard or beetle or whatever it may be a deadly crack.

If he hits the insect's head, the victim is affected in the head and has violent fits until he dies; if the tail or body of the animal is hit, the victim becomes terribly sick, but in this case he can buy off the charm and be cured by a member of the Fangaree murder society.

For the charm to work it is absolutely necessary that the victim turn his head and look upon it, thus making the connection between himself and the charm. For that reason the native will not turn at a noise behind him in the bush, not unless he is startled. If he knows there is bad blood between him and another he is on the alert.

Then the charmer has to exercise prodigious patience, building and rebuilding his trestle along the haunts of his enemy, making a fresh charm every time, until the quarrel is forgotten by the victim and he is taken off-guard, or else the charmer's vindictiveness softens or the quarrel is patched up. Such is Fangaree.

The CAMP-FIRE
A MEETING-PLACE for READERS, WRITERS and ADVENTURERS

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

ONE of our Manila comrades has hunted out and passed on to us some interesting information concerning elephantiasis:

The Manila Times,
Manila, P. I.

In a recent issue I noticed a query from a reader anent elephantiasis, its prevalence in tropical climates and the methods of cure. This morning I dug into the subject at the headquarters of the Phillippine Health Service while covering my beat, and if the information below can be of any service to the inquirer I shall be gratified.

FILARIASIS, commonly termed elephantiasis, is caused by the obstruction of the lymphatic glands and vessels following the bite of the Culex mosquito, the mosquito that carries filariasis and possibly dengue fever. The male of this species is quite harmless, as only the female bites.

The affection usually begins in the legs below the knees or in the scrotum. This last is rare, although we have had at least one case in the Islands of this last type, as proven by photographs of a Filipino which are a part of the records of the Health Service. In this case the scrotum was so enlarged that, with the man standing in an upright position, the base rested on the ground, and he was forced to stand with limbs a-straddle to escape touching the diseased flesh.

ACCORDING to Chandler's "Animal Parasites and Human Diseases" the disease may be cured by three known methods: By a surgical operation whereby the masses of the elephantoid tissue are removed and new skin grafted on the limbs; by an operation for the draining of the lymph from the tissues all the way into the bone or even from the bone itself, and by the injection of "fibrolysin," the discovery of Castellani, an Italian physician, which destroys the fibrous connecting tissues.

From what I could glean from Health Service officials these cures are almost purely theoretical. Persons afflicted with elephantiasis seem to avoid the surgeon's knife and none of the physicians interviewed had ever heard of a cure.

THE disease is a rarity in the Philippines, although I have personally seen one adult Filipino with elephantiasis in a semi-advanced stage, and one tiny girl whose left leg had entirely lost its shape and whose foot was beginning to assume the appearance which suggested the name of the disease. The assistant chief of the sanitary division of the Health Service told me that the last time he had come into direct contact with the disease was about 10 years ago when a Filipino suffering from elephantiasis in an extreme stage was taken into custody at the public market. At that time the average Filipino was ignorant of the cause of the disease and its nature and the man was arrested on the complaints of neighbors who thought it beriberi or leprosy.

Further and more complete information may be obtained from a perusal of the pages devoted to elephantiasis in Chandler's treatise.—Albert H. Lawrence.

A BIT out of a letter to me from Gordon Young concerning his serial beginning in this issue:

I don't think there is much I can say about *Hurgronje* that would be of value to the Camp-Fire. As a matter of fact, it was not a man but a woman with whom I had the experience that inspired the story; she preached just about all *Hurgronje* does, and unless you have been into something of the kind, you can not imagine how convincingly. I think it must be largely in the wonderful voice. Hers was a miracle. All the great fakers I have known have had marvelous voices—I stressed the qualities in *Hurgronje*. I really expected you to balk at *Hurgronje's* "line of bunk" and saved up some clippings that happened to appear in recent papers just to show you what people do believe.

Incidentally: Practically all of the description of *Hurgronje's* weird and miraculous claims is literally true; incredulous as it may seem, the talk of ancient mysteries, secret cities, the detaching of spirit from body, is made convincing to many people of sense.—Gordon Young.

A BIT about Calamity Jane and Wild Bill from one of our writers' brigade at Deadwood. I wish we could arrange to reproduce in "Camp-Fire" the interesting pictures he kindly sent, but—we can't.

Deadwood, South Dakota.
Jan. 17, Year Two of the Camel.

Did I tell you that from my windows here I can look across the gulch and see the monuments marking the graves of Wild Bill, Calamity Jane, Preacher Smith and others of the old-timers who used to help make the welkin ring in this neighborhood?

Many times I have thought it unfortunate that you didn't have inserted in Camp-Fire one page of coated stock on which to reproduce some of the old timers, ancient guns and other subjects of interest along these lines. Of course, inserts are —— to handle and they cost money, but I still think it would be a good idea.

IN CASE you might be interested am sending you a pair of pictures which you may keep. The one of Wild Bill was reproduced from a tintype. I got Jane from a friend here, a photographer who made hundreds of her. She used to sell them around the saloons. She came to this photographer one day, having a few aboard, and wanted a hundred prints made up from the plates he had. He told her he couldn't make any more until paid for the last bunch, an item of $20. Jane put her arms around his neck, laid her head on his shoulder and looking up into his face, said: "My dear boy, don't you worry about that any more. You'll never get a —— —— cent." And she was right. He didn't.

When Jane died she left a large and cumbersome bunch of debts all over Deadwood, as during the last few years of her life she had some very rough sledding and owed nearly every one she knew, but in this neck of the woods everybody is strong for Jane just the same. Proving again that money amounts to but very little in the long race after all.

IN THE Deadwood Commercial Club we have the gun with which Wild Bill killed the gambler on the town square of Springfield, Mo., in 1865. It is a .32 caliber, rim fire, 5 shot, single action.

When Bill was buried here a board was erected over his grave on which were the following words: "WILD BILL—J. B. Hickok—Killed by the assassin—Jack McCall—in—Deadwood, Black Hills—Aug. 2d, 1876—Pard, we shall meet again in the happy Hunting grounds to part no more. Good bye—Colorado Charlie—C. H. Utter."

The grave now is marked by a rough stone statue, various parts of which have been broken off by souvenir collectors. There is a very small stone which tells merely the name and date. Calamity Jane is buried in the same plot.

Regardless of a great deal of comment to the contrary you can take it from the old-timers here who knew him, that Bill was a regular he man and a gentleman. You can't call him names around this section.

Just located a couple more pictures which am enclosing. Wild Bill from a drawing and a group of Wild Bill, Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack.—Earl H. Emmons.

THE letter referred to in the following was, as I took it, intended only for a good-natured josh. However, the following reply, from an American standing up for the Australian sheep-dogs, makes good reading:

Los Banos, P. I.
U. S. N. Radio Station.

In looking over a recent issue of your publication, I noticed an article in the "Camp-Fire" that interested me very much. It was written by some bird in Chicago, I don't recall his name, but he certainly exposed himself by his sarcastic remarks about the Australian dogs.

His sarcasm took the form of a Philipine dog story, and believe me he has never been out here in this neck of the woods, or he would not have pulled a boner like that. Some one had evidently written to *Adventure* in regards to the remarkable sagacity displayed by the sheep and cattle dogs of Australia.

NOW there are no better Americans made than myself, but some of these birds should take a stroll around before they venture to criticise some stories about things that they have never seen. I did not have the good fortune to see the article that he was ridiculing, but having quite a little experience with the afore-mentioned canines I am here in their defense.

I am not going to mention any specific instance, but these dogs are almost human in the work that they perform, and I am afraid if I specify I will not be believed by some of the "home-guards" that read our magazine. I worked in Australia for three years, and was there when the war started in 1914, and never heard about it until the 27th of August of that year. I was in N. S. W. at that time and had worked in Queensland, Victoria, South Australia and the Northern Territory, so you see I should be qualified to judge about certain things that I have seen myself.

IT SURE gets my goat when some bird jumps up and lets a wail out of him about a thing he knows nothing about. I have been going to sea since 1906, both in the merchant service and the U. S. Navy, and have been around the Horn, and also the Cape of Good Hope, more than once, and have been given the razz several times about things that I have seen, and have sympathy for any one who tries to tell one of these wise guys, who never left the old homestead, anything new.

I myself, have seen (five) 500 pounds, or about 2,500 dollars offered for an Australian sheep dog, of the black kelpie breed, and no hard-headed sheepman is going to pay that price for an ornament for his sheep station. I don't mind saying that this offer was refused.

I am a Western man myself, being raised in the stock country in Colorado, and am quite familiar with the methods used in the States to work cattle and sheep, and wish to state here and now that, according to conditions obtaining in Australia, the Australians are certainly *there.*—FRED WINTERS.

THE sources of information for our article on the old days of the West will be of particular interest to the many of us who follow with keen attention everything pertaining to this field:

"One Against Many" consists of the recital of incidents which I got from the following sources:

THE story of Big Foot Wallace was told by Wallace to John Slaughter, who told it to me as I have set it down. It was undoubtedly used by Alfred Henry Lewis as basis for one of his original Wolfville stories in which a soldier sacrifices his life for a companion.

Uncle Billy Rhodes' fight is chronicled, among other places, in the official history of Arizona written by Farish.

The incident of the Apaches and the captain of cavalry was told to D. T. MacDougal, director of the Carnegie Institute of Washington and head of the desert laboratory at Tucson, by the lieutenant of the troop. Doctor MacDougal told it to me.

The Felix story was told me by several persons and is vouched for in McClintock's "History of Arizona."

Broncho Mitchel was told by William Lutley, a well-known cattleman of Cochise County, who got it from Mitchel in the old days.

The other incidents were for the most part told me by persons, and the authenticity in each case was established by looking up old files of the Arizona papers; so that each incident has its own separate news item to prove it. The Tully & Ochoa wagon-train story was given in detail by Carlos Tully, a son of one of the firm; and is told in a Tucson paper of that date. I have dates and names of the newspapers.—F. R. BECHDOLT.

Also—I used the granite wash incident as foundation for a portion of a fiction story; but treated it entirely differently than the original as written in this article.—F. R. B.

HERE is some good dope on the Porcupine and Old Crow Rivers from an old-time comrade of our Camp-Fire who knows the "ground" at first-hand. Also a removal of the Alaskan semi-tropical forest which said comrade himself helped to create:

Seattle, Washington.

C. Foster Clark of Bay City, Mich., asks about the semi-tropical forest reported in Alaska and is answered by Mr. Solomons who, as I know, is an authority on that Northern Country, but as Alaska and B. C. are as large as the United States it is hard for one man to cover the territory.

THIS supposed part of the frozen North is no more than a product of my imagination and, as I helped to spread the report, it is up to me to clear the matter up.

In 1914 I wrote a story, in the Winter at Rampart House on the Porcupine River, and it was based on a yarn told me by one Harry Anthony, who is a well-known character in that part of the world. He swears that, in a stretch of country between the head of the Firth and Turner Rivers and just over the divide from the Old Crow and the Rapid Rivers about fifty miles northwest from Ammermans Mountain, there is a section of the country that never freezes in the Winter and the grass is green the year around. He and Schaffer, his partner, were driven out by a number of huge bears who make this section their headquarters.

The various parties of the Alaskan Boundary Survey, of which at that time I was a member, passed near this place many times and Bern Reaburn, who was in charge of the reconnaissance, reported the non-existence of this country.

I RAN a stern wheeler on the Porcupine for two years and ran the *Midnight Sun* beyond the Boundary crossing of the Old Crow River which comes in to the Porcupine over 300 miles from its mouth. The first steamboat to navigate the Porcupine was by Mr. Turner of the U. S. Geological survey who established the boundary at Rampart House in 1885. The next attempt was in 1911 and several steamers made the trip to Rampart House. The *Tanana*, Capt. James Gray, is the largest steamer to make the trip and she had a hard time but made Rampart House. Capt. Tom Smith and Clare Marcile on the *Frontiersman* went up the Porcupine as far as La Pier House at the mouth of the Bell and report that the river can be steamboated above that point. The mouth of the Old Crow is as far as I have been.

The best way to get up the Porcupine is from Fort Yukon. Any small light-draught power boat will do. Mr. Harry Horton at Fort Yukon can outfit any one who wants to make the trip and will furnish a boat. At Rampart House the trading-post of Dan Cadzow has a full stock of supplies and good guides can be hired at this point. Harry Anthony, Ab Schaffer, Pete Norberg or any one of the men at this point know the country for miles.

Mr. Solomons calls the Bell River the head of the river; the Porcupine at the Bell swings to the south and east in a big circle and soon branches, one fork called "The Fishing Fork" heads in the mountains to the north of the Yukon due north of Eagle. I would judge that the river is navigable for small boats 300 miles above the Bell and the Bell is about 500 or 600 miles from the mouth. The Old Crow which enters the Porcupine about 360 miles from the mouth has been navigated by the *Midnight Sun* for about 300 miles.

AS MR. SOLOMONS states there is game a-plenty and it is one of the best fur countries in the world. Though I want to take exception to one thing he states and that is the temperatures are low. I have seen it a lot colder in the Tanana Valley than in the Porcupine. Though the season is short the Summers are as hot as ——; the Old Crow flats are the champion mosquito grounds of the north.

A little placer has been worked on the Driftwood and Bluefish Rivers, but not enough to pay, though the country has been pretty well prospected. The formation is all wrong—lava and limestone. The Valley of the Old Crow was at one time the bed of a lake and in times gone by has broken through and formed what is called the Cañon of the Crow. This river is the crookedest river I have ever seen and on our first trip up, on relieving Walt Green at the wheel, I asked him how things were going.

"See that mountain?" said Walt, pointing to a small round hill just head. "Well, we have been around it three times in the last two hours."

I said in the first part of this letter that the Old Crow had been navigated about three hundred miles and before any one gets a map of Alaska and scales off 300 miles and makes a —— liar out of me I want to say that that 300 miles was by water and only about 80 miles air line. Where the Crow cuts through high banks the remains of many fossils have been found and one year the Geological Survey sent a party to bring down some of the bones.

The valley of the Upper Porcupine and its tributaries is well timbered, but the hills and flats are bare of all trees and only a few scattering willows are to be found.

I KNOW of no more interesting trip than one from Fort Yukon to the head of the Porcupine and if I had the money, time and were footloose, one that I would rather take. Leaving Fort Yukon, where all the supplies that man can wish for can be had, the first hundred miles is through a flat, very heavily timbered country. You pass the mouth of the Big Black, Salmon and Coleen Rivers and soon strike what is known as the Lower Ramparts. Here the high limestone hills come together and the river flows through a narrow channel. Above, the river widens out and flows through a flat country. Soon you hit the Upper Ramparts and from there to Rampart House, about 100 miles, you have swift water most of the way. You pass the famous "Klang Cree" or Howling Dog Rocks and strike the mouth of the Salmon Trout River. All this time the main river is very muddy and the clear cold waters of the Salmon Trout are a sight that you are glad to see. This is the site of the Old Hudson's Bay Post and if a mess of fish are wanted just drop a hook in the water and the fish will do the rest. It is about 40 miles from the Salmon Trout to Rampart House and most of the way very swift water. When we used to make this run on the *Midnight Sun* this part of the trip was the hardest, as in this 40 miles we used to line the riffles 18 times and to drag about a thousand feet of wire cable over the rocks is no easy job.

At Rampart House you can replenish your outfit but at a heavy price as everything is very high. Here you can pick up a man to take you to the Hot Springs.

Leaving Rampart, the river is good to the mouth of the Crow and from there it is bad, bad, bad, for about twenty miles and then the river is like a slough, "This is going up the Old Crow" to the boundary crossing. From there to the head of the Turner is a matter of dogs or back packing. If you don't want to go up the Crow but want to keep on up the Porcupine, the river from the Crow to La Pier House at the mouth of the Bell is good and from there on you will have to ask some one else as my information plays out as well as my typewriter. The Porcupine from the mouth of the Crow up is clear. All of the mud that colors the Porcupine comes out of the Old Crow River.

Sorry to make this so long, but this is a country that I know and love, so when I got started my fingers ran away. I will be only too glad to give any more information and put any one that wants information on the trail of some of the old-timers who I call my friends in this part of the world.—FRANCIS ROTCH, Jr.

THE critic in this case was perfectly decent in his criticism and therefore entirely in order and doing only what we want all our readers to do—point out mistakes when they see them or think they see them. That is our best safeguard against mistakes in the future and we need all the safeguards we can get, not being technical experts in all of the thousands of fields our stories touch upon.

But I'd like to present this case just in general and by way of calling attention to the fact that writers are human beings like the rest of us. I'm still campaigning against the very few of you who do not seem to understand that they can make their points just as well in a kindly fashion as in an unkindly fashion. Nearly all—all, perhaps—of our writers are members of our Camp-Fire. Why not treat them as such—as comrades?

AND do you never make mistakes yourselves? I know some of you do, for your very criticisms are often mistakes, often an attempt at wisdom in a field you think you know all about and don't.

In a still more general way, is there anything this world needs more than plain, ordinary, man-to-man human kindness and friendliness? And isn't our Camp-Fire very particularly a place for it? Among other things, it's the best way of having a good time.

Criticize by all means, but don't seize on the occasion to be a smart Aleck, to be unkind. Kindness and comradeship get you farther and in a better direction.

THE following letter was written to me personally, but I'm taking the liberty of passing it on to you for the sake of the general cause. As you see, a criticism sometimes lands on a sick man, writers being human beings like all the rest of us.

First let's all root for this sick comrade to get well again. After that there will be time enough to consider what happens to a .400 bullet fired into an ant-hill.

Here is the criticism, or rather the query, made in a manly way and without any unkindness:

In Jan. 18th issue of this year you have a story by F. St. Mars called "Citizen Yurumi." This here Yurumi is an anteater and he has some claws on his front feet. He digs into an anthill. "A bullet from a .400 bore express rifle fired at one of those mounds would be considerably mushed up, but the mound would show no hurt." Does that mean the bullet would flatten against the mound or that it would penetrate and the hole close up after that. I have never been in the So. American jungles (but am living in hopes) so I do not know a thing about the ant-hills there and have only seen anteaters in the Zoo here and there during visits.

And the reply:

Southsea, Hants, England.

My dear Mr. Hoffman:

Your letter of 25th ult. just to hand, and it has worried me so (as things do when sick) that, although I am lying on a bed of sickness (fever reaching 104 degrees nights at times) I feel I must get a reply dictated and posted somehow. I am sorry that Mr. —— has started investigating F. St. Mars and landed in a booby-shop, and given me the trouble at this most inopportune moment of pulling him out again. You say you ought to have done the investigating; I should have permitted myself a sly chuckle if you had.

See right here now.

F. St. Mars is a feller who lives in a place called Hampshire. He takes a Savage .22 hi-power and he fires her at a pine-tree and she penetrates just twelve inches.

Mr. Picus viridis is a green woodpecker, a bird about 12 inches long. He also lives in a place called Hampshire. He takes his strong beak and the brain of a specialist and he bores a hole two feet deep in sometimes solid heart oak—not soft pine, necessarily and that not .22 bore but large enough to admit the bird's whole body.

W-e-l-l?

For centuries blind peoples have been going about seeing Mr. Picus viridis perform this act, and —*never seen it.* I place the two things side by side—work of .22 hi-power and of Mr. P. viridis. *Then* people gasp and the scales fall from their eyes. They are gripped, interested, or say I am a liar.

YET neither Mr. P. viridis and the .22 hi-power, nor Yurumi and the .400 Express can be compared. They have nothing to do with each other at all. They have nothing to do with my facts. They are the "dramatic touch," put there because some folks can not see anything without. Nature works on different lines from the bullet. She makes her perfect tool, her specialized brain, to open up the weakest spot with the least labor.

No, sirs, F. St. Mars has not survived twelve years battering by experts over here for nothing. *But*, mark this, I am liable to slip, as a carpenter is liable to cut himself, and I shall be bowled over by Nature herself one day, who is very deceiving even if one is most careful. Moreover, some people expect too much. They seem to think I am half-brother to every living wild creature, a walking Natural History Encyclopedia, and an explorer of every known and unknown part of the earth, the sea—the sky, under the earth, hell, and almost heaven—all rolled into one.

Yours with all friendly wishes.—F. St. Mars.

TWO queries answered. Probably comrade Winsor will find most of the songs he wants in the book named by comrade Swindell. This old song business is too large a job for us in the office—who have quite a bit to do anyway. But we're very much interested just the same and want all inquiring comrades served, so we're now trying to make arrangements with a real authority to handle the whole matter and make a special feature of it.

You will remember that we once had a similar arrangement with the same John A. Lomax whose book is mentioned below, but called it off because our readers were getting practically no results from it.

Hot Springs, South Dakota.

In "Camp-Fire" I note an inquiry from Wm. E. Menzel, Chicago, asking you to publish the old trail song, "In the Dreary Black Hills." This song has been published, and, if you wish, please pass this information on to him.

Mr. Menzel will find the song in the book entitled "Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads," collected and edited by John A. Lomax, printed in 1918 by The MacMillan Company, New York. It contains a very complete list of the old range ballads.

Last Summer there was an inquiry as to the whereabouts of "Billy The Bear" a noted character of the early days in western Nebraska. His real name is Yeager, and he is clerk of courts at Chadron, Neb.—E. J. Swindell.

La Gravel, Oregon.

Can you direct me how to secure the words to the following songs? "I'm wild and wooley and full of fleas, and I'm hard to curry below the knees;" "Inchin' along;" "Joy on, Joy on the Footpath Way;" "Barley Mow;" "The Keel Row;" "The Merry Cuckoo;" "The Bailiff's Daughter;" "Sourwood Mountain;" "A Jolly Group of Cowboys."

Some one must have these old songs and would like to know who. Words only.—W. F. Winsor.

AS YOU know, there's no regular system in printing our Camp-Fire letters. They come in from all over the world and, as they arrive, are put in their special drawer, sometimes in one pile, sometimes in another. Every so often I take a bunch of them home for odd moments when I can get some of them ready for the printer, the others being done at the office whenever there's time or need. You can see that there's no telling when any particular letter will go to the printer or, after being set, what issue it will go into.

Of course when our writers' brigade send in something connected with a particular story it is put in another file so that it will be used when that story is used. And sometimes there are letters from readers that by their nature call more or less for early printing, or there may be a number on one subject that call for being used together. In such cases I try to keep them separate, and that's where real trouble begins. To do it right I ought to have an elaborate filing system for this special purpose. And then a special secretary to look after the special file. Lacking both these things (and, to be entirely honest, not really wanting them), I just get along some way or other, and as that is quite in keeping with the whole free and easy, informal spirit of our Camp-Fire, I have no pangs about it.

Only sometimes when one of you writes in to ask in what issue his letter is going to appear I'm in an awful fix. I'd tell him if I could, but how do *I* know? A letter is likely to appear any old time—and be just as good as if it appeared earlier. Like the following, written nearly a year ago:

Cliff Island, Maine.

Your query on "Fate's Instrument"—"Do the bushmen kill with poison arrows game that they intend to eat?"—raised a doubt in my mind. I felt sure that they do, but not sure enough to be quoted as an authority. Referring to Major J. Hamilton's book on African Big Game I found the following: "The bushmen of Cape Colony in the old days used to get up close enough to game in the open to permit the use of *poisoned arrows*. . . ." That would seem to answer your question, as the bushmen only killed for food—an example that many so-called sportsmen would do well to follow.

I must confess that I do not see why the poisoned game does not have a bad effect on the bushmen, yet, when one remembers that their favorite delicacy is a raw, over ripe—decidedly over ripe—ostrich egg, it is hard to imagine that a bushman could be poisoned by anything!

Again: the bite of a snake is poisonous, but isn't it true that the venom of poisonous snakes is used as a medicine?

I wonder if any of the Camp-Fire fold can throw any light on this subject?

How about the other savage races which use poisoned arrows; do they hunt game with them or use them only to settle differences with their enemies?—L. PATRICK GREENE.

FOLLOWING our old custom, Arthur Mallory rises and introduces himself to Camp-Fire on the occasion of his first story in our magazine. There is very little any of us can say to this comrade, but I know that each of us reaches out to give his hand a strong, earnest grip.

I was born on a sailing ship in the Indian Ocean, going east. That was some forty years ago, but most of my traveling has been in the same direction, and I am now on my tenth lap. I have never stayed twelve months in one place in all my life. I have never been in Patagonia or Greenland or Mauch Chunk, Pennsylvania. But at one time or another I have been in most of the other places on the map. Along with a million or two of other men old enough to know better, I visited the late sanguinary conflict, stayed around there for a time and, along with a considerable number of others, came away somewhat damaged. In consequence, my wandering days are over. There is only one more journey ahead of me, and that the longest of all; my passage is booked for an early date, they tell me.

And so, being halter-broke for the first time in my life, and very permanently hitched, I settled down to write stories, about a year ago. It helps to pass some very long nights; also, I need the money. I have seen a number of very strange things; I carry the scars of more than one strange weapon; I used to think I had had a great many adventures. But they don't seem important, now that I live in the expectation of a greater—an adventure which shall come to me, one day, in my own bed.—ARTHUR MALLORY.

THE *American Legion Weekly* kindly gives us permission to reproduce this poem from their pages, sent in by one Camp-Fire comrade and written by another. Permission given by one, too, for that matter.

Traer, Iowa.

I do not feel that a youngster like myself has any license to get up and talk in Camp-Fire in the presence of so many old-timers who have had so many more interesting adventures than I, but I have been a most interested listener at Camp-Fire ever since I first became acquainted with the magazine over in France after the armistice.

The discussion as to what really constitutes adventure has been most interesting and I ran across a little poem the other day which has probably been brought to your attention before but which I am sending along to make sure it is not overlooked because it expresses one point of view (my own) in very good style.

This appeared in the *American Legion Weekly*, issue of Jan. 7, 1921.—L. A. Bryson.

ADVENTURE

by Berton Braley

SOME men go round the world
And though, by splendid chance,
Through war and love and hate they're hurled,
They never sense Romance;
Their lives are melodrama sheer,
Tense with both good and ill,
And yet they play from year to year
And feel no throb or thrill.

And other men live quiet lives,
Yet greet each new-born day
As brave adventure that arrives
Accoutered for the fray;
And so in every new event
However dull or small,
They find strange magic evident
With glamour over all.
All true adventure's in the heart
Which gains a warmer glow
From every touch life may impart
Of action swift or slow;
I'd rather play a humdrum game
Which made my spirit flare
Than move through battle, flood and flame,
Unstirred and unaware!

HERE are some interesting bits that bring to us vividly the times of the Revolution:

Philadelphia.
Feb. 23, 1921.

I send you herewith an extract from Lossing's "Field Book of the Revolution," which tells the story of an attack on the village of Currytown, New York, and of an interview with a citizen of that place, who was scalped during the fight, but survived and was hale and hearty seventy years later.

Also another extract from the same work, which will probably upset some folks' notions about the relations of the Penn family with their Indian friends. You will note that the good Quaker was no piker, but made a fairly liberal offer, evidently productive of results. Imagine the wealth Tom Quick would have amassed, had he been in Pennsylvania about that time.

Catlin's notes speak for themselves. He was there on the spot, and tells what he saw with his own eyes.—John T. De Bell.

"WE REACHED Currytown, a small village nearly four miles south of Canajoharie (N. Y.), at about noon. The principal object of my visit there was to see the venerable Jacob Dievendorff, who, with his family, was among the sufferers when that settlement was destroyed by Indians and Tories in July, 1781. Accompanied by his son-in-law (Dr. Snow, of Currytown), we found the old patriot busily engaged in his barn, threshing grain; and, although nearly eighty years of age, he seemed almost as vigorous and active as most men of sixty. His sight and hearing are somewhat defective, but his intellect, as exhibited by his clear remembrance of the circumstances of his early life, had lost but little of its strength. He is one of the largest landholders in Montgomery county, owning one thousand fertile acres lying in a single tract where the scenes of his sufferings in early life occurred. In an orchard, a short distance from his dwelling, the house was still standing which was stockaded and used as a fort. It is fast decaying, but the venerable owner allows time alone to work its destruction, and will not suffer a board to be taken from it.

"ON THE 9th of July, 1781, nearly five hundred Indians, and a few Loyalists, commanded by a Tory named Doxstader, attacked and destroyed the settlement of Currytown, murdered several of the inhabitants, and carried others away prisoners. The house of Henry Lewis was picketed and used for a fort. The settlers, unsuspicious of danger, were generally at work in their fields when the enemy fell upon them. It was toward noon when they emerged stealthily from the forest, and with torch and tomahawk commenced the work of destruction. Among the sufferers were the Dievendorffs, Kellers, Myerses, Bellings, Tanners and Lewises. On the first alarm, those nearest the fort fled thitherward, and those more remote sought shelter in the woods. Jacob Dievendorff, the father of the subject of our sketch, escaped. His son Frederic was overtaken, tomahawked, and scalped, on his way to the fort. (He was not killed, but lay several hours insensible, when he was picked up by his uncle, Mr. Keller, who carried him into the fort. He recovered, and lived several years, when he was killed by the falling of a tree). And Frederic's brother, Jacob, then a lad of eleven years old, was made prisoner. A negro named Jacob, two lads named Bellinger, Mary Miller, a little girl ten or twelve years old, Jacob Myers and his son, and two others were captured. The Indians then plundered and burned all the dwellings but the fort and one belonging to a Tory, in all about twelve, and either killed or drove away most of the cattle and horses in the neighborhood. When the work of destruction was finished, the enemy started off in the direction of New Dorlach, or Turlock (now Sharon) with their prisoners and booty."

THEN follows the story of the pursuit of the Indians and Tories by Colonel Willett with one hundred and fifty militia, who attacked them the next morning, killed forty of them, and followed them up with such vigor that they fled in haste toward the Susquehanna, leaving behind their equipment and all their plunder.

"AT THE time of the attack, the Indians had placed the most of their prisoners on the horses which they had stolen from Currytown, and each was well guarded. When they were about to retreat before Willett, fearing the recapture of their prisoners, and the consequent loss of scalps, the savages began to murder and scalp them. Young Dievendorff (my informant) leaped from his horse, and, running toward the swamp, was pursued, knocked down by a blow of a tomahawk upon his shoulder, scalped, and left for dead. Willett did not bury his slain, but a detachment of militia, under Colonel Veeder, who repaired to the field after the battle, entombed them, and fortunately discovered and proceeded to bury the bodies of the prisoners who were murdered and scalped near the camp. Young Dievendorff, who was stunned and insensible was seen struggling among the leaves; and his bloody face being mistaken for that of an Indian, one of his soldiers leveled his musket to shoot him. A fellow-soldier, perceiving his mistake, knocked up his piece and saved the lad's life. He was taken to Fort Plain, and, being placed under the care of Dr. Faught, a German physician, of Stone Arabia, was restored to health. It was five years, however, before his head was perfectly healed. He is still living (1849), in the midst of the settlement of Currytown, which soon arose from its ashes, and is a living monument of savage cruelty and the sufferings of the martyrs for American liberty.

"Note: I here present a portrait of Mr. Dievendorff, which he kindly allowed me to make while he sat upon a half bushel in his barn. Also, a sketch of the back of his head, showing its appearance where the scalp was taken off. The building is a view of the one referred to in the text as the Currytown fort, now standing in Mr. Dievendorff's orchard. The method used by the Indians in scalping is probably not generally known. I was told by Mr. Dievendorff and others familiar with the horrid practise that the scalping-knife was a weapon not unlike, in appearance, the Bowie-knife of the present day. The victim was usually stunned or killed by a blow from the tomahawk. Sometimes only a portion of the scalp (as was the case with Mr. Dievendorff) was taken from the crown and back part of the head, but more frequently the whole scalp was removed. With the dexterity of a surgeon, the Indian placed the point of his knife at the roots of the hair on the forehead, and made a circular incision around the head. If the hair was short, he would raise a lappet of the skin, take hold with his teeth, and tear it instantly from the skull. If long, such as the hair of females, he would twist it around his hand, and, by a sudden jerk, bare the skull. The scalps were then tanned with the hair on, and often marked in such a manner that the owners could tell when and where they were severally obtained, and whether they belonged to men or women. When Major Rogers, in 1759, destroyed the chief village of the St. Francis Indians, he found there a vast quantity of scalps, many of them comically painted in hieroglyphics. They were all stretched on small hoops.

"JOHN, a grandson of William Penn, and the son of Richard, then one of the proprietors, living in England, was lieutenant-governor of Pennsylvania when the Stamp-Act and kindred measures of government stirred up a rebellious spirit in the colonies. The Province was then engaged in hostilities with the Delawares, Shawnees and Seneca Indians, who were committing dreadful atrocities on the western frontier. It seemed necessary for Governor Penn to assume the attitude of an enemy toward the people with whom his grandfather lived so affectionately, and it is painful to contemplate the fact that he offered, by proclamation, in the city of Philadelphia, a bounty for the capture of Indians or their scalps.

"The war was successful, and in the Autumn of 1764 the hostile Indians sued for peace.

"The bounties were as follows:

"For every male above the age of ten years—captured, $150; scalped—being killed, $134; for every female Indian enemy, and every male under ten years, captured, $130; for every female above the age of ten years, scalped $50.00."

HOW about this? Roger Daniels of our writers' brigade brings it up:

> It might make an interesting discussion at Camp-Fire to discover where all the wolf-dogs of fiction are bred. How many of *Adventure's* Alaskan and Canadian wanderers ever saw one?—ROGER DANIELS.

SOME of you will be keenly interested in the following concerning the American Indian Centenary to be held at Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, August 16th to Sept. 10th inclusive.

> This is in no sense a local affair, but is a national Indian celebration. We believe that it will be the greatest of its kind ever held in the United States.
>
> The program will consist of pageantry, Indian opera, drama, tableaux, and living pictures, a six-day rodeo, various pow-wows and Indian councils. Beautiful temporary buildings will be erected and in many respects it will equal many of the smaller world's fairs or expositions given lately.—JAMES LATTIMORE HIMROD, Prairie du Chien, Wis.

HERE is something that reached me too late for making the change suggested. From a letter from F. St. Mars concerning one of his former stories in our magazine:

> Will you please note that in "Goomasaka Makes Good" the female alligator pips her eggs with front claw, *not* mouth. I have corrected this slip in English proof, but, being dangerously ill and receiving no U. S. proof, same escaped me.—F. ST. MARS.

WE FIGURED that you'd sort of like it if we notified you in advance when a letter of yours was to appear in "Camp-Fire." Sometimes there's delay and you write in to inquire, or else don't write but wonder. This new plan, recently put into operation, seems to meet the needs of the case.

We use a plain post-card which says only: "You'll be interested in the —— issue —A. S. H." Only that; not even the name of the magazine. So the small minority of you who do not sign your names in print to your letters will not be advertised locally. We use post-cards instead of letters because our office has a heavy load of detail already and the former are far easier to handle and send out.

Of course the card will go to what was your address at the time you wrote the letter and if you've moved on you'll have to depend on it being forwarded.

If the plan isn't O K from your end, let us know.—A. S. H.

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one.* They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules,* thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure,* New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *post-paid,* the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 *Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply* Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL SELL: First Sept., 1917, to Mid-Dec., 1920. Twenty cents each or lot postpaid, $14.00.—Address WALTER G. WESTPHAL, 133 Spaulding St., Watertown, Wisc.

WILL SELL: April, Mid-Sept., First Oct., 1917. All 1918, 1919 and 1920. Twenty cents a copy; postage extra.—Address MORTON H. SPENCER, R. 4, Wellsboro, Pa.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of this issue.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *unstamped* envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 519 Citizens Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections subject only to our general rules for Ask Adventure, but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. Ask Adventure covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts
Captain A. E. Dingle, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

2. The Sea Part 1
Beriah Brown, Seattle Press Club, 1209 Fifth Ave., Seattle, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next department.*)

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
Captain A. E. Dingle, Hamilton, Bermuda. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
Raymond S. Spears, Little Falls, N. Y. Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs, and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
Hapsburg Liebe, Orlando, Fla. Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Me. Maine. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
Joseph Mills Hanson (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure.* The Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. Early history of Missouri Valley.

8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
John B. Thompson, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

9. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
Larry St. John, Melbourne Beach, Fla. Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Lake Michigan. Fishing, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, clamming, early history, legends.

10. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

11. Western U. S. Part 2; and Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 West 10th St., Austin, Tex. Texas, Oklahoma, and the border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

12. ★ Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. Mahaffey, Apartado 168, Mazatlan, Sinaloa, Mexico. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, business and general conditions.

13. North American Snow Countries Part 1
S. E. Sangster ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Height of Land and northern Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern Ungava

★(*Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in stamps NOT attached*) and Keewatin. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 2
Harry M. Moore, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Ottawa Valley and southeastern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation.

15. North American Snow Countries Part 3
George L. Catton, Tweed, Ont., Canada. Georgian Bay and southern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 4
T. F. Phillips, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Hunters Island and English River district. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

17. North American Snow Countries Part 5
Ed. L. Carson, Burlington, Wash. Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

18. North American Snow Countries Part 6
Theodore S. Solomons, Carmel, Calif. Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, higiene; mountain work.

19. North American Snow Countries. Part 7
Reece H. Hague, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.

20. North American Snow Countries Part 8
Jas. F. B. Belford, Codrington, Ont., Canada. New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power.

21. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. Halton, 632 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

22. Central America
Edgar Young, care *Adventure*. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, language, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

23. South America. Part 1
Edgar Young, care *Adventure*. Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile; geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

24. South America. Part 2
P. H. Goldsmith, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

25. Asia, Southern
Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

(Note:—Gordon MacCreagh, the editor of this section, is on an exploration trip, and owing to our inability to obtain a suitable substitute this section is suspended during his absence.)

26. Philippine Islands
Buck Connor, 1555 Wilcox Ave., Hollywood, Calif. History, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

27. Japan
Grace P. T. Knudson, Castine, Me. Japan. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

28. Russia and Eastern Siberia
Major A. M. Lochwitzky (formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Austin, Texas. Petrograd and its province, Finland, northern Caucasus, Primorsk district, island of Sakhalien. Travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

29. Africa Part 1
Thomas S. Miller, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, Niger River to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora, tribal histories, witchcraft.

30. Africa Part 2
George E. Holt, Frederick, Md. Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

31. Africa Part 3 Portuguese East Africa
R. W. Waring, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

32. ★ Africa Part 4 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
Charles Beadle, Ile de Lerne, par Vannes, Morbihan, Brittany, France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

33. Africa Part 5 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
Captain F. J. Franklin, 40 South Clark Street, Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

34. ★ New Zealand; and South Sea Islands Part 1
Tom L. Mills, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Postage 8 cents.*)

35. South Sea Islands Part 2
Charles Brown, Jr., 213 E St., San Rafael, Calif. French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn). Natives, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture.

36. ★ Australia and Tasmania
Albert Goldie, Hotel Sydney, Sydney, Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

WEAPONS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the Ask Adventure editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. J. B. Thompson, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. D. Wiggins, Salem, Ore.

C.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all fire-arms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheellock and snaphaunce varieties. Lewis Appleton Barker, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. Thompson, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; bait and fly casting and advice; live bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines, Porto Rico, and customs receiverships in Santo Domingo and Haiti, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address L. S. Rowe, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. C. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Comm., Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★*(Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents—in Mr. Mills' case 8 cents—in stamps NOT attached)*

The Diamond Fields of British Guiana

THAT there are diamonds in this rich possession may be a surprize to the general reader which will rank distinctly second to the greater surprize that the population is over four-tenths East Indians. And negroes compose almost another four-tenths, while the aborigines, whom we'd expect to see lots of in their own home, run less than three per cent. How come?

Question:—"Is there any thing to the story of diamonds in British Guiana?

If so, what are the laws in regard to them?

What is the country like? Climate, topography, natives, etc.?

Is there any thing a man could work at until acclimated? Any mining or construction work?

What arms and equipment should we take with us?

What would be the best way to strike into the country?"—FRANK PARTRIDGE, Lowell, Mass.

Answer, by Dr. Goldsmith:—Diamonds have been found in British Guiana from its settlement. They were discovered in connection with gold mining and washing. The regions that have been most productive are those along the upper Mazaiuni at Putareng Creek, and about the Kuribrong and Cuyuni rivers. They have been taken out by washing the gravel and by sluicing. The stones are of very good quality and size.

Mining concessions or leases for ninety-nine years or less may be obtained in practically any area on the payment of about ten dollars with the application and an annual rental of twenty cents an acre on April first of each year. One of the conditions is that the owner shall diligently explore for gold, silver, precious stones, etc., unless permission shall be obtained for cessation of work. There are several other details, but the terms are generally liberal.

The climate is tropical, but a few hundred feet above sea-level the temperature is bearable. The topography varies from the flat lands at sea-level to considerable hills and mountains inland. Much of the country is still covered with forests.

If by natives you mean the inhabitants, they are (according to the latest statistics available) as follows:

	PER CENT.
Europeans	1.33
Portuguese	3.40
East Indians	42.74
Chinese	.89
Blacks and Africans	39.01
Mixed races	10.22
Aborigines	2.33
Races not stated	.08

The population is somewhat under three hundred thousand.

It is probable that an enterprising man could find something in or near Georgetown at which to work while looking around and getting acquainted, but I think one would have to trust somewhat to luck and circumstances and his own initiative. I can offer no suggestion as to what might be done in general. I should not bother much about equipment.

Any kind of light rifle would be proper arms, and you could supply yourself with both this and with other needed supplies in Georgetown. Your best way to go inland would be to start from Georgetown. You could go from New York to Georgetown on a boat of the Quebec Steamship Company (34 Whitehall Street, New York) and the cost would be about one hundred dollars for the steamship fare. There are some railway and river lines from Georgetown inland.

Put at least five cents postage on all letters addressed to Ask Adventure editors who live outside the U. S. Always enclose at least five cents in International Reply Coupons for answer.

Summer Work in the Wheat-Fields

HERE'S a way to see the Southwest and West and quit the trip with more money than at the beginning. But of course it involves work:

Question:—"I am twenty years old; have always lived in the East but would like to try my luck out West to build up myself; or if there is a chance to learn, would do 'most anything.

What work would you consider best to my advantage? Would you suggest the wheat-fields? If so where would be the best place to locate? When would be the best time to start?

If the wheat-fields were not the place what would you consider best?"—RAYMOND A. SEXTON, Pittsfield, Mass.

Answer, by Captain Hanson:—If there is any trade, profession or line of work with which you are especially familiar you will probably find opportunities for using it in the West as you would in the East; Western towns are not greatly different from Eastern ones industrially nowadays, excepting that they are probably less overcrowded on the average.

If you came West with the intention of working in the wheat-fields, you could start the latter part of June in Texas or Oklahoma and work north through Kansas, Nebraska and the Dakotas, finishing some time in September in North Dakota. Even after that you could doubtless find some threshing. If you are strong, willing and not afraid of work, ordinarily you can get plenty to do and at good wages, though how it will be the coming season in view of existing unsettled conditions it is hard to say.

But you must bear in mind that working in the wheat-fields is merely a matter of a job from day to day for three or four months; and when you have finished all you will have will be your experience and such money as you may have saved from wages. Perhaps that is all you want; to gain experience. If you want more, you might stumble upon opportunities while following the harvest.

At all events, I can say that opportunities for settling down in almost any line of work or business, in town or in the country, are not lacking in the West for young men who are ambitious and anxious to get ahead.

South-Sea Island Life

IT SURE seems to be *the* life:

Question:—"Wish to ask about the South Sea Islands. Any chances for hunting and adventure? How about climate? Could a position as a trader be obtained? If so, what is the average pay?

Could two young fellows, say, with $200—meaning with $200 after arriving at the islands—stay for perhaps a year? What about natives and firearms? Could we live on the fruits and such on the island? How about snakes and wild animals? Also mosquitoes?

Are the tropics as beautiful as some writers make them out? We would like to live apart from other white men if possible.

Could we hire a guide for a year, meaning a native? Could we get an island by ourselves? Would we need a boat? Could we earn anything, I mean as traders or farmers? Does it really rain for months at a time?

I hope I haven't buried you under an avalanche of questions; but as you see I know nothing of the South Sea Islands. I am, however, sick of this rotten climate and want to get out.

What would it cost to get there from Maine? About how long? Well, I've bothered you enough, so will close."—C. F. DE COSTA, South Portland, Me.

Answer, by Mr. Mills:—There is not much in the way of hunting in the South Sea Islands, taking them by and large, in the sense in which hunting is generally understood in the outside world. For you must understand that the S. S. Islands, generally speaking, are of coral formation, and therefore do not run up into the mountains and forests with which good hunting is associated. Of course, there are the large islands, such as the Fijis and Samoas, that are somewhat different; but even there you can not hunt in the usual sense of the term.

But if anybody wants real hunting, with any amount of risk to life and limb, why, Papua (New Guinea) is today the greatest place ever. And for the explorer after something new, the adventurer who would risk himself amongst the head-hunters and the prospector after oil and metals, there he has the *terra incog.* of these latter days.

As for adventures in the South Seas generally, if by that term you want something unique and new experiences, you will find them aplenty all over the Pacific. The fishing is good sport everywhere, and all the natives will show you sensations in the game of hunting the big shark and other game of the seas.

The climate varies all over the areas of the groups of S. S. Islands. For the most part it is salubrious. Hot in spots, of course, for here you are in the region of the tropics and are more or less on the equator.

Tourists from all the ends of the earth regularly do the rounds of such healthy groups as the Cook Islands, the Fijis, the Society group, the Samoas and the Tongan group, in all of which the natives are friendly. There are still cannibals in the New Hebrides, but despite this a good deal of growing and trading is done there by white people.

Local conditions largely influence the salaries paid to traders and managers of plantations, for whom there is a fair demand. The salaries are not nearly so high as those ruling in the outside world.

You should have at least $500 in your pouch when you land in the islands, so as to be free to move around before coming to a decision. Of course, with care $200 each would be some help, and would certainly help to make up your mind more quickly.

The taking of firearms into the more settled groups is not encouraged unless the visitor is an accredited sportsman; and there are birds for the shooting. You could certainly live on the fruits of the islands. Snakes and wild animals are for the most part a minus quantity. The mosquito is ever present.

The S. S. Islands are lovely, they are beautiful, they are unique—and then some, as the tourist said when words failed him to describe their exquisiteness.

There are no guides for hire in the Pacific. If you want to get out of the beaten track, then you ship on a trading-schooner that has a roving commission from one of the busy groups—and then maybe you can pick a little island of your own. You certainly should have a boat if you want to make a living at the game of trading.

It is *infra dig.* for white men to hire themselves out as anything but managers or gangers in charge of natives. The rainfall over the S. S. Islands is not phenomenal, and on the average as normal as in most other parts of the world. It certainly does not rain for months at a time.

Your best plan, if you are determined to make the great adventure, would be to go down to New York, where you might be able to ship on a tramp steamer for a Pacific group at a cheap fare. If you wanted to take one of the regular three-weekly liners from San Francisco to the heart of the Pacific, then by rail and steamer the cost per passenger would run you into $300 second class. These are only round figures, for rates and fares on land and sea are changing so much that I can not be bound down to the definite.

With luck and making all connections promptly, you can get from New York to Papeete in the Society Islands *via* San Francisco, in some three weeks.

How to Get a Springfield

UNCLE SAM will help you to become a marksman if you follow these directions in asking him:

Question:—"Can you tell me where I can procure a United States magazine rifle, model 1903; or as it is commonly called a Springfield?"—JAMES C. MACKINTOSH, Detroit, Mich.

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—Write to the Secretary, National Rifle Ass'n, 1110 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C., requesting a membership application blank, and prices of rifles, ammunition, etc. He will send a blank application for annual membership, costing two dollars. A list of arms and the prices on the same will also be sent.

The membership will cost two dollars, as I stated above, and I think the rifle will cost about $35 for a plain gun and 69c extra for star-gaging, or measuring the bore to determine its diameter. I think a rifle with checked trigger and butt-plate especially selected for the national matches will cost about five dollars over the price of a plain rifle, or say forty dollars. But they are worth it; I put four bullets in a spot three-quarters of an inch in diameter at a hundred yards with one such rifle; best group I ever shot.

You will be obliged to pay the transportation of the rifle to your home from the nearest army depot or armory. But at that it's the best chance I know of to get hold of such a high-class weapon as our service rifle.

It's a good thing to enclose with your order a recommendation from some city or county official; perhaps a letter from the commander of the local American Legion post would help. The government is rightly very cautious as to who gets the rifle.

Climate of Skagit Valley

WHO says it's bleak Winters in western Washington, even though the State does adjoin the land of Our Lady of the Snows? Not Mr. Carson anyway. Indeed, his description of a January day in his neck o' the woods sounds almost semi-tropical, even to us southern New Yorkers:

Question:—"I should be glad of some information about British Columbia.

We are farming on the prairie here, but wish to sell out and move to a more congenial climate. There is my husband, self and baby. We are middle-aged people and expect to have almost enough money to keep us in a simple way. Say about $20,000.

We would like to buy a small place, say 5 or 6 acres with house, etc., and especially an orchard. The latter is a special point. My husband wants a dry climate. I would like to be near a good library if possible. We don't want to pay a fancy price or to live in a fashionable quarter.

Could you name a few places answering these requirements, and if possible give me names of a newspaper or two published at such places?"—MRS. W. H. WEIR, Streamstown, Alta., Canada.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—If you do not care to leave the British flag I believe you will find the country you are in search of on Vancouver Island between Victoria and Nanaimo. If you are indifferent as to country I would suggest western Washington.

Land runs as high as $500 per acre; but remember that this land will produce 100 bushels of wheat or 160 bushels of oats or six tons of hay to the acre, while if farmed intensively, say for cabbage-seed, it will net as high as a thousand dollars per acre for a crop that requires about eighteen months to mature.

Berries and other fruits, rhubarb, beans or spinach will give a return of $500 to $700 per acre.

As to climate, I have been here nearly six years and do not own either a raincoat or an umbrella. Of course these things are used extensively, but so far I have been able to get along without them regardless of the weird stories of continuous rainfall. If you can imagine your Winter snow coming in the guise of warm rain you will get an idea of what our Winter really amounts to.

Today (Jan. 21) I was out in the orchard looking for hen's nests. I picked a quantity of apples that had been neglected last Fall which were still in excellent condition. I could have gathered a gunnysack full; but they are all right where they are till they may be wanted.

Our carrots, beets and parsnips are still in the garden. We dig and use them as required.

A youngster came in one day last week with an armful of "pussywillows." These have been "out" almost since the first of the year.

Pansies, wallflowers, marigolds and even roses have been blooming out of doors all Winter. On an island twenty miles from here the yellow gorse is in bloom with this year's crop of blossoms.

These things will give you an idea of what the climate really is out here; and although I have been over a good bit of the world I have never seen any spot that equals it.

A small place such as you describe both as to size and location can be picked up almost any time, and I might add that there is plenty of opportunity to invest or loan surplus capital at good rates of interest.

Vancouver Island Development League, Victoria, B. C., will send you a booklet on application. I have recommended the island, as the climate there is much better than that of the mainland in the same latitude.

Situated a hundred miles south of Vancouver, B. C., we find a great difference in the climate; and as you probably know the Skagit Valley is one of the most fertile spots in the world.

I am sending to you a copy of the *Herald*, which will give you an idea of the markets and the real estate offered for sale.

You might also write Chamber of Commerce, Bellingham, Wash., for a copy of any literature or information they have for distribution.

I might add that I too am a Canadian, and should you decide to come out and investigate will do all I can to assist you in any way.

Send question direct to expert in charge—NOT to the magazine.

Tumaco

GIVE up guessing; it's the name of a place. "Tumaco-by-the-Equator," a real-estate development blurb artist would probably call it:

Question:—"Will you forward me at your earliest convenience any available information that you may have regarding the climate and the inhabitants of Tumaco, Colombia?

I would be very grateful for knowledge concerning the language spoken there, also whether Spanish dialect or Castilian Spanish."— —— ——, Boston.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—Replying to your letter requesting information regarding climate and inhabitants of Tumaco, State of Cauca, district of Nariño, Colombia; also language, whether Castilian or Spanish dialect.

Tumaco is just about as far north of the equator as Guayaquil, Ecuador, is south of it—something like 2 degrees, if I remember right. Guayaquil has the distinction of being, or to be fair to Guayaquil it *had* the record of being, the unhealthiest place in the world, until recently when it was sanitated. Guayaquil, however, is up some forty or fifty miles inland from the coast, on a swampy river, away from sea breezes and sterilizing salt water.

Tumaco has a much better climate than Guayaquil. It has the open sea in front and a road behind it leading to the higher, cooler, healthier highlands.

Ah, those highlands! Up there the ideal spot for climate can be found, by searching up the slopes between the tropic heat of Tumaco and the snow-laden peaks of the mountains. This is a traveled road. Husky *arrieros* and sturdy mules, muscular, stolid Indians, coffee-planters from the highlands, miners, traders—they come and go over the road leading up into the highlands from the sea.

Tumaco is one of the principal ports of the Pacific coast of Colombia; Buenaventura is the other. Much trade, reckoned by local standards, is carried on by boat with Guayaquil, Esmeraldas, Buenaventura, and Panama.

The coast line of the Panama-Guayaquil P. S. N. C boats stop there on call. Its population is reckoned at about 12,000.

The better class houses are built of whitewashed 'dobe covered with red tile. They range from this down to tiny huts of bamboo covered with grass thatch. The people are mixed Spanish-Indian-negro with pure bloods of all three mixing together on perfect equality and speaking a patois Spanish.

The Spanish is not Castilian. It is the so-called Western Spanish and differs from Castilian in the pronunciation of Z, LL, and D. The nearest approach to Castilian in any of the Latin-American countries is spoken in Lima, Peru.

Tumaco is not so warm as one would suppose. It rarely climbs over 90 at any season of the year. But it continues to stay warm. One does not have an overplus of energy, especially after having been there for two years or more.

By observing strict rules health may be safeguarded. I would put it as follows:

At every opportunity get away for a day or so into the cool highlands. Be sure and sleep under nets or in screened houses to avoid being stung by mosquitoes. Take two grains of quinin each night before retiring, all the time. It will do no harm and will prevent the bane of the tropics, malarial fever. Quinin is an absolute antidote against malaria. It is one of the three sure cures known to medical science. Don't overeat. Don't overwork.

Ask Adventure service costs you nothing but reply postage.

The Barking Mosquitoes of Hawaii

AT LEAST, Mr. Halton says that "their bark is worse than their bite." But maybe he was only indulging in a figure of speech:

Question:—"After trying in vain to obtain definite information concerning the Hawaiian Islands from people who have been there I must have recourse to the kind offer in *Adventure.*

You would make me happy if you could kindly answer some of the following questions. They may sound foolish, but I am entirely in the dark and confused from the contrary reports I heard.

1. Are there any mosquito-free places at sea-level on the islands?

2. Do tropical fruits grow wild on the dry sides of the islands?

3. Is a man camping there allowed to catch fish for his own use?

4. Are the dry sides of the islands free from fever?

5. How old, at most, do people get there? (I read in the book "Long Life in California" that there was never a person on the Hawaiian Islands to attain a hundred years of age, owing to damp climate.)

6. Would one buy a lot for house, or tent and garden at sea-level in a fever and mosquito-free locality?

7. About how much would be the price?

8. The Mormon Church has built a temple somewhere on the islands. Would the conditions as asked above, somewhat exist at that place, and where is it located?"—JOHN MUELLER, San Francisco, Cal.

Answer, by Mr. Halton:—I am sending you under separate cover booklets descriptive of the islands, and will answer your questions as follows:

1. No. It is claimed that the mosquitoes were imported from China and their "bark is really worse than their bite." There are no malarious mosquitoes in the islands.

2. Tropical fruits such as mangoes, oranges, lemons and bananas.

3. The Hawaiian fishing rights are very peculiar. In the days of monarchy when a man purchased a piece of land on the water-front he also purchased fishing rights in all the waters in front of his property. So that strictly speaking a man is trespassing if he fishes anywhere in the islands. As a matter of fact fish are very plentiful, and I have never heard any one objecting to fisherman indulging in their favorite sport.

4. The islands are quite free from any malaria or other fevers, for the reason that there are no poisonous plants or insects—other than the ubiquitous mosquito above referred to—to be found anywhere.

5. As a rule, people live to a good age in Hawaii. Some fine specimens are still alive who are only 107 years young. Being essentially an outdoor land, it is conducive to longevity; and I know a great many gentlemen very active in civic life who are over 70 years old.

As a matter of fact Hawaii is not as humid as one would imagine. Probably the humidity would be less at the same time of the day there than it would be in San Francisco.

6 and 7. It is pretty hard to give any idea as to the price one would have to pay for a lot, which would all depend upon the locations.

8. The Mormon church is located at Laie in the island of Oahu, about 35 or 40 miles from the city of Honolulu. I should judge that in the neighborhood of Laie you would be able to obtain just the class of accommodations in the matter of land that you desire.

If there are any other questions you would like to ask, do not hesitate to let me know.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

ERRICSON, JAMES. (Feather River Slim.) Fairly well-known around Milwaukee, Wis. and parts of Iowa. Any information will be appreciated.—Address HOWARD SKEEK, 2119 Brookwood Ave., Toledo, Ohio.

WATKINS, ROBERT. Last heard of in the Transvaal. Was discoverer of Bob Watkins Reef, and Manager of the Ellerton Extension Mining Co. Fought in the ring. In last letter said he was going up-country with a man by the name of Cronin, of Dallas, Texas. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address R. W. WATKINS, 826 Roll St., Mt. Oliver Sta., Pittsburgh, Pa.

FITZGERALD, GARRAT. Brother. Age about forty-four, height five feet, eleven inches. Last seen in Boston. Have important news for him. Any information will be appreciated.—Address L. T. 419, care of *Adventure.*

WURTHA, CHARLES. "Chink." Send me your address. Efforts to reach you through Denver post-office fail.—Address ARTHUR O. FRIEL, care of *Adventure.*

RATTRAY, JOHN. Last heard of in Pipestone, Manitoba. Any information concerning his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address JAMES EDGAR RATTRAY, care of *Adventure.*

McPHERSON, KENNETH. Last herd of about two years ago at Breckenridge, Canada. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated by his nephew.—JAMES E. RATTRAY, care of *Adventure.*

REDDING, EARL F. Formerly of Bandon, Oregon. Enlisted June 9, 1917, at Fort McDowell, Cal. Discharged Sept. 15, 1919, at Fort Clark, Texas, giving his address for future reference as Eureka, Cal. Has dark brown eyes and brown hair; height about five feet four inches, has small scar on left side of upper lip. Earl please write to your father. Have good news for you.—Address GEO. REDDING, Coquille, Oregon.

LAWSON, HARRY OR HAMMY. May be in Washington, Seattle or Alaska. Have not heard from him since before the war. Mother anxious.—Address A. T., 5 Dunn St., Bridgeton, Glasgow, Scotland.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

BITTEL, GEORGE. Your brother is very anxious to hear from you. Mother is still yearning for the day when you will come back to us. Any information concerning his whereabouts will be appreicated.—Address CHRIS. BITTEL, 2041 Washington Ave., New York, N. Y.

KING, CLARENCE. Sometimes called Peterson. Heard from years ago living in Austin, N. Dak. Later moved near Moorhead, Mont. and took up homesteading. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated by his old pal.—Address D. L. HATHAWAY, Farraut, Texas.

WOULD like to hear from all the boys who spent any time at the base hospital at Mesves, Nievre, France, at the time I was there. Especially from John, "Monk" Leydon, Riley from 1st. Div. first name unknown. Carl Mann, of the Marine Corps, and Capt. John D. Nixon, now of Chicago, Ill. Also from any of my old buddies from the 77th Div. Am still in service at Fort Williams, Maine, in Medical Corps. Am married now and have a little cottage by the sea and may make room for some of the boys who care to spend their vacation in old Maine.—Address EDWIN W. BENSON, Box 135, Cape Cottage, Me.

KENNEDY, JAMES A. Formerly of Nebraska. Last heard of in Detroit, Mich. Any information will be appreciated.—Address L. T. 418, care of *Adventure.*

LAKE, ARCHIE LEWIS. Age twenty-four, height six feet, weight at time of enlistment 133 pounds, light hair, blue eyes, nicknames "Deacon" and "Slim." Fought in France with the 97th Co., 6th U. S. Marines. No trace of him since August 29, 1918, when reported to be in a hospital in France. Believed to be alive, but suffering from loss of memory. Any information will be appreciated by his mother.—Address MRS. JENNIE LAKE, La Grange, Ill.

MILLER, WALTER HARCOURT. Brother. Born March 1, 1882, in Manchester, England. Lived in Fargo, N. Dak. several years. Worked in Opera House—scene shifting—also a member of glee club. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. A. J. THORNE, 220 Clermont St., St. Paul, Minn.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

TURNER, JOHN. Uncle. Last seen at Mile 49 B. C. Age about sixty, gray hair and mustache; height about five feet four inches. Prospector and cook. Any information will be appreciated.—Address T. H. BLANCHARD, Prince George, B. C.

WALKER, GEO. FRANCIS. Brother. Was in "The Children's Home Society of Pennsylvania" in 1900. Then four years old. March of the following year was with Walter and Maggie Walker. Any information concerning him will be appreciated.—Address MRS. JENNIE BOWMAN, 1010 W. Walnut St., Shamokin, Pa.

FIELD, WM. H. German. Sixty-four years, weight 180 pounds, light complexion, large build. Last heard of in New Orleans, 1102 St. Charles Ave., January 29, 1920. Interested in horses and horse-racing. Traveled a great deal. Has been in France. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write.—Address L. T. 420, care of *Adventure.*

BRIEGER, ARTHUR. Brother. Very anxious to know of your whereabouts. Any one having any information please address.—MRS. SCHWEIDER, 496 East 164th St., New York, N. Y.

KOTELMAN, HARRY T. Age about forty-two, light hair, grayish-blue eyes, weight 160 pounds, height about five feet eight inches, heavy shoulders, inclined to stoop a little. Last seen at Diamond Springs, Eldorado Co., California. Any information will be appreciated.—Address P. B. KOTELMAN, 233 N. Vir St., Reno, Nevada.

KING, JIM. Write to me. Everything is O.K. I settled the whole deal.—Address A. N. SHELDON, 113 So. Division St., Buffalo, N. Y.

DONEGAN, JOSEPH T. Engineer in Merchant Service. Was a long time on the West Coast. Last heard from in New York, 1914 on S.S. *California.* Any information will be appreciated.—Address F. COPELIN, Gen. Del., Los Angeles, Cal.

ANZINI, HENRY V. Age twenty-five, height five feet ten inches, weight 160 pounds, light brown hair, blue eyes, fair complexion. Last seen in San Francisco, Cal. November 29, 1920. Any information will be appreciated.—Address WM. E. FORMWAY, Mountain View, Cal.

WHITLOCKE, J. E. Write your old pal from Montana.—C. M. A., Dunsmuir, Cal.

MOSES, REUBEN. Of Montreal. Please communicate with your old friend.—Address BARNEY RUSSELL, 105 Mozart St., Montreal, P. Q., Canada.

BURKE, MAX. Letters sent to Buenos Ayres returned unclaimed. Just back from England. Did not hear from Koppell. Everything is well. Please write.—BARNEY RUSSELL, 105 Mozart St., Montreal, P. Q., Canada.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

SOEDING, HARRY. Age forty, five feet nine inches tall, weighs 175 pounds. Left Philadelphia about seventeen years ago. Was at Atlantic City, N. J., during Summer of 1917. Was buyer for a large hotel. May have changed name to Miller or Mueller. Any information concerning him will be appreciated.—Address GUSTAV SOEDING, 2835 North Watts St., Philadelphia, Pa.

WOULD like to hear from any friends who served in the 37th Co. U. S. Marines, Camaguey, Cuba; 110th Irish Inf. Overseas Batt., Canadian Ex. Forces; Fort Wadsworth, N. Y. Batt. D. 20th Field Artillery, U. S. Army.—Address HENRY KURTZ, 37th Co., Camaguey, Cuba.

VAUGHN, ROGER D. Last heard from in Danville, Va., March, 1920. Age sixteen, weight 110 pounds, ruddy complexion, brown hair and eyes. Any information will be appreciated.—Address L. O. VAUGHN, Box 172, Riverside, Cal.

ABBOTS, ALBERT. Age twenty-nine, five feet six inches, weight 150 pounds, black hair, black eyes. Occupation tool-maker. Formerly of Bridgeport, Conn. Any information concerning him will be appreciated.—Address WM. E. BURTON, Washington and Madison Aves., Bridgeport, Conn.

BOYD, ASA. Last heard of at Sulphur Bluff, Texas. Lived at Wennsboro, Texas. Any information concerning him will be appreciated.—Address R. M. BOYKIN, 1539 N. 61st St., Philadelphia, Pa.

WHEELER, ANDREW J. Harry C. Diamond. Last heard from September, 1920, from Fresno, California. May have gone to South Africa. Height six feet, curly red hair and light blue eyes, freckled, very long fingers, age thirty-eight. If you see this, please write to dad, Sulphur, Okla., Box 243. Any one having any information please write.—Sister, KATIE MCKEE, 837 North Angus St., Fresno, Cal.

WHITE, THEODORE, JR. Former member 165th U. S. Inf. Discharged at Camp Upton, L. I., 1919. Appointed an army field clerk at Hoboken, N. J. about March, 1919. Later on duty with the Personnel Br. G. S. Washington, D. C. Discharged as A. F. C. about June, 1920. Last heard from, employed by the Graves Registration Service, Paris, France. "Ted" old scout am longing to hit the trail. If you are in Europe, let me know the lay of the land. Remember good old Washington Days? Any one knowing his address please write.—Address PETER M. O'BRIEN, A. F. C. Hqrs., Hawaiian Dept., Honolulu, H. T.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

SNOOK, MRS. ANNA E. Left home December 24, 1920. Age twenty-six, height five feet, weight 100 pounds, light complexion, black hair, gray eyes. Any one knowing her whereabouts please write.—H. J. SNOOK, 3000 West 2nd St., Des Moines, Iowa.

SHOLEA, SGT. J. J. I appreciated deeply the daring you displayed in facing heavy shell fire to bring me to safety October 21, 1916, at great personal risk to yourself.—Address JAMES E. BARCLAY, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

BURNS, J. M. (Bobbie). Invalided from Canada in 1917. Returned to France with A. R. C. Ambulance in 1918. Hit Egypt, Palestine, Syria, with Joe in 1919. Can't reach you at the Noys Crossing, Alberta, Canada address.—Write A. R. GLYDE, Red Hook, Dutchess Co., N. Y.

COLES, HARRY A. Last heard of at Prescott, Arizona about 1916. Painter, miner, prospector, trapper. Jack of all trades. Write your old side-kick who pushed the burros with you in the "Grand Cañon" country. Am in U. S. P. H. S. Hospital at present.—Address 1546, care of *Adventure.*

HALL, DR. W. W. Last heard from in Sikeston, Missouri. Over six feet in height, weighs about 190 pounds, has dark brown hair and mustache—may be gray now—and dark brown eyes, fair complexion. Is a native of Versailles, Ky. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address Sister. VIRGINIA HALL, 715 East Church St., Jacksonville, Fla.

JAMES, FRANK. Brother. Last heard of in New York in 1905. Born in St. Croix, West India Islands. Is now fifty years old. Any information will be appreciated.—Address ANA MARIA JAMES, Calle Virgin No. 56, Santiago de Cuba, Cuba.

SADUSKY, JOSEPH. Mechanic in Btry. F. 9th F. A. Last heard of at Fort Sill, Okla. Have garage proposition. Please write at once.—Address JESSE P. BLAIR, Bellune Apts., Venice, Cal.

WOULD like to hear from A. E. F. men of the 310th Machine Gun Batt. Co. B. 79th Div.—Address E. F. HETTINGER, 37 N. Lake Ave., Albany, N. Y.

BRONK, HENRY. Enlistment paper found. A Co. 10th Regt. N. G. S. N. Y. Enlisted at Albany, N. Y. by Capt. John H. Reynolds. Dated October 11, 1877. Communicate with E. F. HETTINGER, 37 N. Lake Ave., Albany, N. Y.

JOHANSON. Brother. Emigrated from Mokullen, Sheby Stratsnas, Sweden forty years ago to America. Last heard of with an uncle in Illinois. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address C. WILHELM JOHANSON, 10 Leverett St., Boston, Mass.

STEAMSHIP *AUDITOR.* Am desirous of obtaining present address or name of ship of Elmer F. Goodlett, formerly chief officer steamship *Auditor* and Guy Speicht, also of steamship *Auditor* during voyages to Hamburg and Bremen, April—October, 1920. Write CHARLES B. PARKHILL, Supercargo, care of Lykes Brothers, Galveston, Texas.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

HARRINGTON, I. R. Brother. About five feet six inches tall, weighs about 150 pounds, light-brown hair, and blue eyes. Is thirty-five years of age. In 1909 was living in Dubuque, Iowa and about to go to Lewiston, Minn. Father and mother in poorhealth. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address ELSIE M. FARRINGTON, R. 6, Box 17, Sparta, Wis.

ADAMS, JESSE. Last heard from was in Des Moines, Iowa. Any information will be appreciated.—Address PEARL ADAM, 630½ E. Wash. St., Springfield, Ill.

WENDLER, WILLIAM D. Age forty-two, five feet ten inches tall. Last heard from living at 56 East 121st St., New York, N. Y. Piano tuner by trade. Any information concerning him please write.—Sister, MRS. H. E. BATES, 17½ 19th St., Buffalo, N. Y.

HENDERSON, JACK. Age about twenty. Please write your old friend.—Address BARNEY RUSSELL, 105 Mozart St., Montreal, P. Q., Canada.

RELATIVES of Mrs. Meffond Wintermute. Maiden name Myrtle H. Simcoe. Born in Roanoke, Va., but left there about twenty-one years ago. Her Aunt, Mrs. Eliza Elam, moved to Fort Worth, Texas, where she died ten years ago. Would like to get in touch with some one who knew her.—Address MRS. MEFFOND WINTERMUTE, 208 S. Grant Ave., Columbus, Ohio.

FOX, ALBERT and four children, Florence, now aged twenty; Albertina, nineteen, has auburn hair; Thomas, eighteen; Alice, sixteen. May have changed name to Charles Hoag or Hawk. Children by first wife, Emma Lange, who died during earthquake in Los Angeles, 1906. Mr. Fox is now forty-six years of age, has dark hair, blue eyes and is five feet nine inches tall and wears a mustache. Moved to Lisbon, N. D. in 1906 later to Minot, N. D. Last heard of in St. Paul in 1910. Married Magdeline Haak in 1909. Any information will be appreciated by relatives.—Address H. F. ALTMANN, P. O. Box 707, Sandpoint, Idaho.

ATTENTION CANADIANS. Old pals of the 1st Depot Batt. Manitoba Regiment. Coates, Landrigan, Bumby, Keller, Richards, Kirkpatrick, McGrew and any of the others who survived the Big Show. Write your old side-kick JACK PROUT, Ansted, Fayette County, W. Va.

CONENEN, GEORGE (Whitie) Season of 1918 with Ploack Bros. Carnival. Last heard of at Nitrate, W. Va. Am very anxious to hear from him.—FRANK J. MOSHER, Box 59, Norfolk, N. Y.

TAYLOR, WILLIAM W. Last heard of May 10, 1920. Working for Robert and Kerr Cattle Company in Oragrande, New Mexico. Age twenty-nine, dark complexion, and black hair, weighs about 150 pounds. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write.—T. J. TAYLOR, 636 Mary Ave., Raton, New Mexico.

McFARLAND, EARL. Of Warren, Ohio. Any one knowing his present whereabouts please write to C. J. M. care of *Adventure*.

THE following have been inquired for in either the Mid-May or First June issues of Adventure. They can get the names of the inquirer from this magazine.

ALLEN, Luther B.; Baglin, Jack; Barnett, Mrs. James; Berger, Ole Eleassen; Brockmeir, Otto H.; Botting, Leonard; Buck, Sadie; Burgess; Clark, William H.; Cummins, Mozart; Curts, Frank E. (theatrical name Frank Manning); Darlington, Michael P.; Davis, Frank; Doppman, Frank C.; Dunkleu, Gunner Leslie Hill; Fairbanks, John Custus; Fredet, Peter; Gilbert, Robt. E.; Gilberto, Ruacho; Grady, George S.; Hank, I. J. B. F.; Harmon, Nancy Mabel; Harry G.; Hilliard, Houghton; Hupp, Charles E.; Jenness, Dale; Kannengiesser, Olga; Mason, Henry Arthur; McDonald, James; McMullen, Mrs. Grace; Mitchell, Ben.; Montgomery, A. J. H.; Mothes, Paul M.; Munkins, Haven; Pendleton, Eugene; Pollitt, Percy W.; Reynolds, John; Robbins, Ellsworth H.; Scott, Henry E.; Shaffer, Edw. W.; Sheldon, Mrs. Ella (Mother) Fred and Adelbert (Brothers); Smith, Harold; Swenson, Neil; Thrope, Frank; Tidblad, Carl Erhard; Toulsness, Ole; Underwood, Ray; Webb, Joseph Ralph; Weldon, Frank.

MISCELLANEOUS—A. E. P. or Pat. Former members of 657th Aero Squadron; Mrs. G. S. or relatives; Maher, Danny: (Mischaud) Heavy Frank; Harvey, Geo.; or any of the boys of Batt. D. 31st F. A. A. E. F. Nieces and nephews of Fred and Sallie Gibson; relatives of John Burgen; sons and daughters of Joe Hancock.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH; Ruth Gilfillan; Jack P. Robinson; Ray Ozmer; Miss Jimmie Banks; O. B. Franklin; Lieutenant Wm. S. Hilles; G. H. Bennett; Byron Chisholm; A. B. Paradis; E. E. S. Atkins; G. E. Hungerford; A. Gaylord; E. J. Moran; F. S. Emerson; E. Murphy; J. Higmon; J. E. Warner; L. E. Patten; L. T. Bennett; Sinn Cardie; James Mosse; C. E. Wilson; R. W. Kinsey; C. H. Huntington; D. Polowe; George Stanley; S. C. Holston; P. Brady.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity.

ALDRIDGE, F. P.; Allen, Paul; Beaton, G. M.; Mr. and Mrs. Bennett; Blighton, Frank; Bonner, J. S.; Bromell, Mr.; Buckley, Ray; Carpenter, Robert S.; Carr, John; "Chink;" Chisholm, D. F. K.; Clark, Ernest S.; Cleve, Jim; Clingham, Charles; Coles, Bobby; Connor, A. M.; Cook, Elliot D.; Cook, William N.; Corbett, Fred P.; Craun, Galen E.; Curtis D. A.; Courtlandt, Victor; Fisher, 1st Sgt. R.; Hale, Robert E.; Harris, Walter J.; Hoffman, J. M.; Howard, Charlie; Hughes, Frank E.; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Irving, Thos. L.; Jackson, Robert R.; Klug, Chas. C.; Kuckaby, William Francis; Kutcher, Sgt. Harry; Lafler, Mrs. Harry; Lancaster, C. E.; Lander, Harry; Larisey, Jack; Lee, Wm. R., M. D.; Lonely Jock; Lovett, Harold S.; McAdams, W. B.; MacDonald, Tony; MacKaye, D. C.; Mackintosh, D. T. A.; Mendelson, Aleck; Nelson, Frank Lovell; Nylander, Towne, J.; Olmstead, Harry E.; Parker, Dr. M.; Parker, G. A.; Parrott, Pvt. D. C.; Phillips, Buffington; Phipps, Corbett C.; Pigeon, A. H.; Raines, Wm. L.; Rich, Wagoner Bob; Rogan, Chas. B.; Rundle, Merrill G.; St. Clair, Fred; Sasek, Frank: Schmidt, G.; Scott, James F.; Smith, C. O.; Starr, Ted.; Soloway, Jack M.; Van Tyler, Chester; Von Gelucke, Byron; Ward, Frank B.; Wiley, Floyd; Williams, Capt. W. P.; Wood, George; J. C. H.; W. W. T.; S. 177284; L. T. 439; WS-XV.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you.—Address L. B. BARRETTO, care of *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

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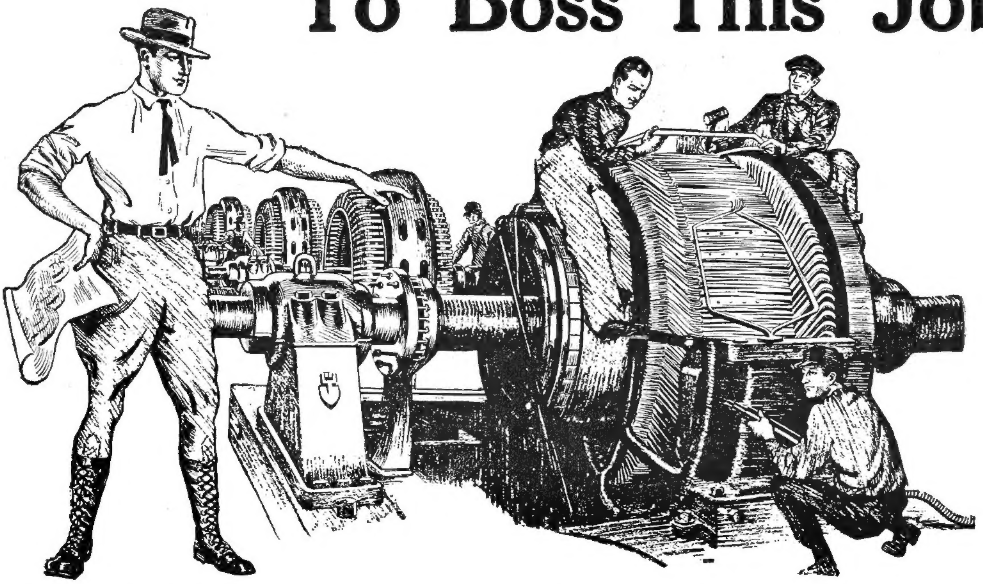

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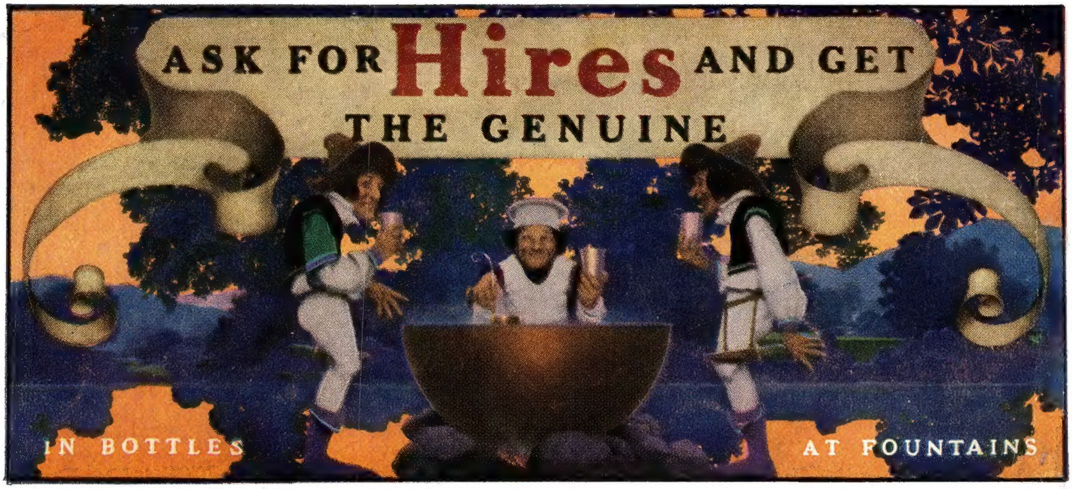

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